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Robert Annys: Poor Priest



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A Tale of the Great Uprising

By

ANNIE (NATHAN) MEYER



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TO THE READER

ADMIRERS of William Morris — among whom I count all his readers — will recognize the personal description of John Ball as taken from his "A Dream of John Ball." They will also note that some parts of his sermon as well are from the same book. It seemed to me that certain bits of Morris's imaginative work were too fine and true to be spared in any attempt to set the blunt old poor priest before the modern reader. I have no fear of bearing off undeserved palms ; for just as a few of the sayings of John Ball bear the marks of authenticity too clearly upon them to be mistaken for mine, so such as are taken from Morris are as clearly distinguished by the marks of supreme beauty and genius.

In the course of many years of close reading, it is inevitable that there should have been woven into this book some of the ideas and prepossessions of certain Church historians. Although many other writers have been exceedingly helpful and suggestive, I want especially to acknowledge my indebtedness to Renan, Kingsley, Fisher, Baldwin Brown, Gosselin, Braun, Montalembert, Vincent, and Sheppard.

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ROBERT ANNYS: POOR PRIEST

A Tale of the Great Uprising

I

THE great Minster of the Fens never looked lovelier than at the close of a November day, 1379. The coloring of Fenland is not attuned to the brightness of Spring or Summer, but there is in the late Autumn a subtle quality that brings out its true charm. The dull browns and yellows of the marshes, the warm red-browns of the rushes, the pale greens of the swamp grasses with the glint of the sun low down at their feet,—all on this day found just the right complement in the great, heavy, gray clouds that broke here and there only to show irregular bars of saffron sky. Just before night fell there was one supreme moment when a patch of gold lingered in the north just over the wonderful octagon, the glorious crown of St. Audrey, and the great west front with its noble tower and its wealth of windows flung the orange gleam of the setting sun over

ROBERT ANNYS: POOR PRIEST

the landscape as a gauntlet proudly thrown in the face of Night. The lordly outlines of the vast edifice looked lordlier than ever as the slowly gathering darkness descended and drew it up into itself.

The east wind blowing from over the sea, pungent with the odor of marsh plants, was keen, and caused a man who was surveying the scene to gather his thin gown more closely about him. Until he stirred, this man might almost have been taken for a part of the landscape, so admirably did his garb of coarse russet sacking harmonize with his surroundings. Although he shivered slightly, he did not move from his position, but remained with arms tightly folded on his breast, and his deep-set eyes fixed earnestly upon the solemn pile before him. A solitary figure he stood in the vast stretch of sky and land, and he felt himself peculiarly alone. Yet as he faced the Cathedral there was no sign of faltering or dread in his face, but rather a distinct note of defiance.

Not long before, the stately procession of priests had departed from the Vesper service. A choir boy of angelic countenance, but impish spirit, had for an instant trailed his violet robe in the dust and flung the stone he picked up

straight at the russet form. Not a priest in line but envied the boy. Outwardly, the russet priest showed no sign. He thought of St. Francis who had been stoned by the very ones who later placed those stones under his direction. Also he thought of the stoning of One greater than St. Francis.

One year before, at Oxford, Robert Annys had bidden farewell to his beloved master, John Wyclif, and had become one of his noble band of poor priests,—or russet priests, as they were familiarly dubbed,—who went about the country, preaching the Gospel and teaching the people how to read, that they might bring Holy Writ more closely into their lives. As a student, he had passed many happy years by the side of his great master at Balliol, translating the Bible into the language of the people so that they might come to know God and love God by themselves without the shadow of the priestly office ever between. Nevertheless, although he had been well content to pass all his life in that beautiful manner, when the time came that his master ordered him out into the world, he went without a murmur and bravely, empty handed, with no more thought of the morrow than had the twelve whom Christ had bidden:—

"Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money; neither have two coats."

Since then he had lived close to the people, he had been of the people. He had come to them, not with the crumbs from the Communion table but with the strong bread of life. He had preached the Gospel in the fields while the heat rose in palpitating waves, and on the downs while the hail beat on his bare head; he had prayed over them while the shears dripped white from the sheep of their overlord; he had hungered with them and thirsted with them and shared such coarse food as they had; he had watched with them as some worn soul departed from its worn body. His way had led to no sumptuous oratories of towered castles, to no cushioned *prie-dieux* in scented chambers. He had shrived, not grand seigneurs and haughty dames whose momentary comfort had been disturbed by the pricking of a superficial regret, but strong, simple souls who trembled from the sway of tremendous feeling — men who thirsted for the blood of their child's betrayer, victims who raged at infamous injustice and brooded over desperate means to escape their thraldom. No lightly felt peccadilloes were confessed to him, but the agony and

shame of those whose tortured souls hung betwixt heaven and hell.

And he had grown to love this life. He had thought to have a peculiar aptitude for letters, and his master had never altered translation wrought by him. Yet he knew now that his gift lay rather in swaying men, and one short year had done much to make his name known from Sussex to Lincolnshire. No wonder, then, that he had joy in his work, ~~for it is not given to man to know greater happiness than this: to watch the face of a fellow-man kindle with a new and great hope, which he knows he has planted within the other's breast.~~ Yet deep down within there had been slowly growing in his heart a secret questioning. He had been warned by his master to hold himself strictly to the work of spreading the knowledge of the Gospel, and he had been clearly enjoined against undoing the peace of the realm and setting serfs against their masters, as a certain mad priest named John Ball was even at that moment doing, both by the reckless violence of his language and the revolutionary quality of his theories. It was easy for Wyclif in the shelter of the University to warn against over-haste and to protest that education must come before a lasting reform could be accomplished, and that one

must build on solid foundations for the future. It was not so easy for the wandering poor priest, with the sufferings of the people ever before him, to refrain from pressing the Gospel into immediate action. Annys began very soon to suspect that it was impossible to feed the people with the knowledge of Holy Writ and expect no indigestion to come from the strange diet. If Life truly began to be tested by Holy Writ, some idols must fall—if the Church Hierarchical, alas for it! If Christian society were to be modelled on the plain teachings of its Founder, some strange sights would be seen.

Annys had not needed to be stoned to feel rise up within him a fierce hatred toward that stately church that reared its head so haughtily to heaven. Ah, truly he held with St. Boniface of old that “in the catacombs the candlesticks were of wood, but the priests were golden. *Now the candlesticks are of gold.*”

That morning, when he preached to the men in the fields and told them in homely language of the life of their Lord and His death to save them, a summons had come from the Bishop of Ely bidding Robert Annys appear before him. And, wondering what the Bishop could want of him (unless to order him peremptorily from his dio-

cease, in which case it was scarcely necessary to do so in person), he had had himself rowed over the wide-spreading meres that separated the isle of Ely from the mainland. As he slowly approached the glorious pile, there came over him with a curious stir the memory of that King Canute who had also been thus rowed across and who had bade the oarsmen pause midway that he might listen to the beautiful chanting of the monks.

Truth to tell, for all his passionate disdain for what lay outside of the true heart of Christianity, he was more profoundly moved by the beauty of Ely Minster than he would have dreamed it possible. For he was an ardent student of history, and here before him was wrought as true and noble an epic as ever was writ on parchment. Into these noble arches and soaring towers, these delicate pinnacles, these exquisite traceries, surely the adoring heart of Mediævalism had lavishly poured itself. This russet priest was an artist and worshipped beauty, hence he could not look on Ely unmoved. He was an Englishman to the fingertips, hence he could not stand on ground so alive with heroic traditions and not thrill to the memory of them. As he stood there in the gathering darkness before the church, he saw a long struggle before him. He saw the Bishop of Ely

and the whole powerful Church of Rome leagued against him. And why? Because he followed Christ's clear mandates. Yet he was certain that nothing that the Hierarchy could do would conquer him. He would stand to the end, alone if need be, but fearlessly true to his convictions, true to the master who had sent him out into the world to do His work. Something of the grim determination of those Saxons of old entered into him, those hardy warriors who had fought so many hundred years before on that very spot and made their last dogged stand against the conquering Normans; something, too, of the undaunted will of that old monk-architect, who, even amid the roar of the falling walls of the old tower of Ely, had conceived the great new tower, the wonderful octagon which was unique in all England.

No! no threat of imprisonment or other punishment on the morrow could make him swerve from the course he had chosen. He would continue to go among his people with only a book and a bag. His people who awaited him among the hayricks, who let plough rest idle in the furrow or tossed aside the spade that they might hearken to him. *His people!* His eyes dimmed with tears as he thought of the pathetic figure of Piers

Ploughman standing in the fields, the light of a great wonder in his face,— Piers in the condition of a man who has had his eyes bandaged for a long time, and now for the first time has had the bandage removed. In the strange light that now bursts upon him the most familiar objects take on a new and strange appearance. In the transformation that is going on about him, all that his honest heart has held stable, omnipotent, eternal, now sways unsteadily before him: Feudal Lords, Sheriffs, King's men and Kings; Fees in Tithe, Manorial Holdings, Rights of Labor, Acts of Parliament, and even Holy Church herself. No, no, come what may, he could never desert Piers now:—

“One side is . . .
Popes, cardinals, and prelates,
Priours, abbots of great estates.
The other side ben poor and pale;
And seeme caitives sore a-cale.”

The night closed slowly down upon the Cathedral. At last its great mass was felt rather than seen.

“Thy strength against mine,” the poor priest murmured, as he lingered yet an instant.

“Thy strength against mine.”

II

THE following morning Thomas Goldynge, Bishop of Ely, lay in bed awaiting those to whom he had promised audience. It was with considerable curiosity that he awaited the young poor priest whom he had summoned. He sighed with relief as he realized that the hard fight which he had waged against Rome was ended. It was a contest over the best method of suppressing the poor priests, and it had taken many secret embassies to Rome, and many letters in cipher sent to trusted friends at the Papal Court. Indeed, it had looked at one time as if the Bishop himself, aged as he was, would have to undertake the long and tedious journey to the Holy City, for the Bishop looked upon this matter as one of vital importance to the Church. He agreed with the Papal Legate that the incendiary preaching of the poor priests must be stamped out, but he had some theories of his own as to this stamping-out process, and persecution bore no part in them. He, more than any other Churchman, realized that the English

people needed careful handling. How was the Italian Legate to understand anything of the rage and indignation that were growing up in the hearts of the English against foreign subjection, against a Church that gave the best sees in the land to Italians who scarce deigned to make acquaintance with the very outsides of their churches? The substance of the people was being wrung from them to help the cause of their bitter enemies. The King of England had little or nothing left for his needs because the Church refused to give up one tittle of its moneys for the good of the realm. Goldynge was an Englishman, and he had struggled all his life to place Englishmen in English churches. He was against the new spirit of Nationalism, however, when it asserted itself against the most sacred prerogatives of the Church, for he could look far ahead and see that this spirit might become powerful enough to wreck the Church Universal and give birth in England to a Church that would forswear all allegiance to Rome. He was for doing all in his power to redress the wrongs of the people and keep the breach from widening, for Holy Church had about all the schisms it could well take care of for some time to come.

When Robert Annys was ushered in with head

flung well back and every line in the lithe young body eloquent of a proud defiance, the Bishop raised himself on the pillow and looked long and eagerly into his face. Therein he read all that he had counted to find. In the deep-set eyes, the high, narrow brow, the sensitive mouth, the delicately chiselled chin, there were revealed to the shrewd old prelate the enthusiastic temperament of a reformer, the idealism of a poet, the puissant desire to work, to change, to remake. And also, and therein lay his secret satisfaction, he read the fine acumen of a critic. A dangerous quality that, which was certain to make war upon the other qualities that struggled in his breast. Here was before him no blunt fanatic like John Ball, flying as unswervingly to his goal as the arrow shot from the bow, but one with the discerning mind that weighs, discriminates, and looks far enough ahead to see its own heart-break at the end.

“ You sent for me? ” although the tone was defiant, it was less so than Annys had intended it. Somehow he found it hard to be arrogant to this gentle old man whose flowing locks looked whiter than ever against the deep red of the bed-curtains. Only a beautiful old man upon his couch, looking at him with dim kindly eyes and a mouth that

smiled. Far rather would he have faced a haughty prelate in rustling robes—that would have roused him and strengthened him in his hatred of all for which a Bishop stood.

“Yes,” replied the old man, very gently, “I have sent for thee, for I have heard much of this russet priest who sways great bodies of men as they hearken to him, even as row upon row of corn is swayed by the wind that blows across the fields. I wished to see him and hold converse with him.”

“Why should I come here before you that you may look upon me? I owe no allegiance to the Bishop of Ely. I serve him not, I serve only my master, John Wyclif.”

“And our Master, Jesus Christ?” mildly interposed the Bishop.

“Yea, I serve *my* Master, Jesus Christ,” asserted the poor priest, “but”—he was annoyed to find that the words in his heart did not rise so easily to his tongue as he would have them do. He felt the old man’s eyes gravely fixed upon him.

“But?” he suggested with sedate politeness—“but?”

The young man reddened with discomfiture, but remained silent.

“I beg of you to go on,” said the Bishop,

suavely; "we are quite alone. I have sent for you to understand what is in your heart, and I would that you open it to me without fear."

The word stung the poor priest as the older man knew it would.

"Fear? I have no fear. What should I fear? I would say that one cannot serve two masters at one time, the one Christ, the other Antichrist. I do not see that one can bear at one and the same time the pectoral cross and the cross of Christ Jesus."

It was now the Bishop's turn to redden, but he only bit his lip for an instant and then smiled frankly. "I understand," he said, "I have heard somewhat of this kind of thing before. You poor priests claim that Christ founded no cathedrals, and that He worked with fishermen instead of Bishops. I know ye would like to see the palaces of Bishops razed to the ground that bread might be placed between the lips of the hungry, the gold of the altars melted that it might run into the purse of the poor. As your poet hath it,

"'Let Bishops' horses become beggars' chambers.'

Is that not it?"

His listener folded his arms tightly over his breast and nodded for answer.

"Ah, yes; ah, yes," continued the Bishop, musingly, "do I not know? Was I not even as thou in my youthful days? But I am an old man now, and many things lie bathed in the clear white light of knowledge that then lay darkly shrouded in mystery. My dear son, you are only one of many who fix their eyes on what should have been, instead of on what really was. Ye bury your faces within the pages of the Bible, and if ye look up once to see what is going on about you, it is only to contrast with impatience the teaching and example of the Church Visible with the teaching and example of Christ and His disciples. Ye are willing to look on the Church as it now is, and God knows there are faults and crimes enough to excuse some of your impatience, but ye refuse to look at the history of the Church, and at the magnificent service it has rendered in the cause of humanity. Ye refuse to consider gravely and seriously the work that it has accomplished, and to ask yourselves if any other human agency could have done a tenth as well. You critics are as men who have been saved by a bridge from a wild and devastating stream, and now once safely crossed, ye kneel down — not to thank God Almighty for having saved you, but to detect the flaws in the bridge."

Annys could not but be moved by the eloquence of the old man. He began to understand something of the great power which had been wielded from the throne of Ely. Yet he waited not with his answer, "Christianity is no longer the Church of Christ, it is the Church of Rome. Why keep up the pretence longer? I am but seeking to bring the people back to Christ as St. Francis did before me."

"Ay! as St. Francis did before you. He was so sure that all the world needed was the Word and his Rule of Poverty. Well, how many years after his death was it that the people complained to the authorities of the great wealth of the Franciscan monasteries?"

Annys remained silent.

"The Church is a more intricate matter than any one Book or any one Rule," went on the Bishop. "Why think you it was that the wolves of the north, as St. Jerome well called them, those wild tribes of Franks and Burgundians, of Vandals and Goths and Visigoths, savage as their onslaught was, yet paused in the face of Rome? Was it not because the Churchmen at the critical time were no idle dreamers, but the greatest statesmen the world ever saw? Ah, my son, if temporal power meant a fall from the early apostolic Church,

do not forget that it was a fall brought about by the very greatness of its own servants. It was to the early Bishops that the world was forced to look for its rulers when the reins of government were slipping from the weak hands of all others. It was Cyprian at Carthage, Jerome and Leo at Rome, Ambrose at Milan, Augustine in Africa, Boniface at the court of Pepin, Martin at Tours, Hilary at Poitiers, and Marcel at Paris who were doing the work of the world. It is easy to speak of the Pope's need for Charles the Great when he placed the diadem of the Cæsars on the Frankish Emperor's brow; yet if Leo needed Charles, Charles needed Leo, as well, and we do not quite so often hear that. My son, the mitre has resisted many a blow that would have shattered the sword."

"Ah, but how much finer had the Church of Christ been built up even as Solomon would have had it, if it could have truly been said of the Head of the Church: —

"‘He shall not put his trust in horse or rider, and bow, nor shall he multiply unto himself gold and silver for war, for he shall smite the earth with the word of his mouth.’"

"A beautiful dream, no more, my son. Take the Crusades; how easy is it for critics to aver that an intriguing Pope started them to increase his own glory and gratify his sense of power.

Yet hast ever thought whether the peoples of Europe would not have fallen upon and destroyed one another but for the wise craft of a leader who united them by finding a common enemy? Now do not misunderstand me; no one more than I realizes the awful sins of the Schismatic Popes, the terrible greed of some of the powerful Churchmen, their criminal neglect of their charges; no one realizes more that the people have wrongs that should be righted. But I am sure it is for the good of the people that these wrongs be righted from within the Church. The people have no better friend than the Church. It has been the one Institution which has sought out the individual, and asked of him only what service he could render it. In its bosom it has held the divine spark of the equality of man, and kept it there and protected it while the world was not yet ready for it. It has nourished it until it will be a flame great enough to light the torch of Freedom.

“We agree, save that you think the world is ripe for that spark, and I know that it is not; loosed now, it will but scorch and sear; it is not ready to illumine.”

Annys had listened with profound earnestness to the impetuous words of the great prelate; be-

fore he could respond, the speaker continued, with a great light of enthusiasm in his face:—

“Think on the refrain which you know well. Con it when you are tempted to think that the Church has done naught for the people:—

“‘ Had they (the priests) been out of religion,
They must have hanged at the plowe.
Threshing and diking fro towne to towne,
With sorrie meat, and not halfe ynowe.’

“What can that mean, save that the Church hath taken up into its bosom the men who otherwise had no career save the plough? True, the time has come when the Church once again needs to be drawn nearer to the people—the people who all yearn for it and need it. Do not lead the people away from it, lest in the end you destroy their faith and undo them. The Church needs just such workers as thou; come to us and work with us. Stand no longer without!”

At this appeal, the young poor priest suddenly roused himself.

“What? stand no longer without! work with you! with a Church whose head hath launched bull after bull against my master and his teachings? Come within a Church that sets the ruling of a man above the words of Holy Writ? The chief article of my creed is that the Gospel suffices

for the salvation of Christians without the keeping of ceremonials and statutes that have been made by sinful and unknowing men. What work has Holy Church for me? Surely there are others who can mouth more glibly than I the words of the Mass, and who are more deeply versed in the labyrinths of canonical lore."

"What canst thou?" replied the Bishop, warmly, "everything! Once within the Church, thou canst raise the authority of the Scriptures, beat down the vicious barriers that exist between the people and the prelates. Remember, one blow from within counts for ten from without. Come within, and help me in my fight against foreigners who care naught for the people who are their charge, foreigners who never deign to approach these shores, save perchance to count the moneys that are yielded from their sees." Then with a swift change his voice softened, and there was a pathetic appeal in it. "I have fought hard for more than thirty years," he pleaded. "I am worn in body and spirit; if I die to-morrow without providing for a successor, doubtless all that I have accomplished will be as naught. The old conditions in this diocese will arise again. There are many priests and abbots—ay! and some higher than they—who will click their heels gleefully over

my grave. Come to Ely and be its Archdeacon. I—nay!—the Church of Christ has need of thee. Come!"

The poor priest was astounded. How could this be that the archdeaconate of Ely should be offered to a poor priest, one of Wyclif's band, so distrusted and hated by Rome?

"You, the Bishop of Ely, you offer me this? It is no jest?"

The Bishop smiled. "Well, I do not mind confessing that it was no easy matter to bring about. Yet why should we go on permitting you to take people away from the Church? I am persuaded that the people need the Church as much as the Church needs the people. They have your confidence; I want you to bring them back to the altar."

"But, Father, the instant I doff this russet gown and don the albe and stole, that instant the people's confidence in me is gone."

"I cannot believe it has gone so far as that."

"Yea, I say it. It is too late to try to drag the people back. They have grown weary of having fat and lazy priests prate to them, with white hand on full belly, of patience and humility and duty to their overlords. Why do the people believe in me? Why do they follow me? Because they

wot well that my meals are as uncertain as their own, that my face is roughened by the same wind that roughens theirs. Because I can look into their faces and say, ‘I too have a-hungered, I too have a-thirsted, I too have sweated in the fields.’ ”

The Bishop looked very old and tired. A sob rose suddenly in the poor priest’s throat. To his own surprise, suddenly he flung himself upon his knees before the couch.

“ Little thought I, Father, when I came here with defiance and distrust in my heart, that I would fling myself on my knees before you; yet it is true that I feel it as a great personal sorrow that I cannot both stay with you and also answer the call of my master. But I cannot desert my people. Where they turn up the soil, where they guide the plough, where their tired backs bend, where the wind and the hail beat down upon them in the fields, there is my place, and there I must go.”

The Bishop’s sensitive face quivered with emotion. He remained silent an instant and then looked up into the young man’s face. “ Wilt promise me one thing? ”

“ If I can, Father.”

“ Wilt preach the sermon in the Cathedral next Sunday? ”

Annys hesitated an instant before he replied.
“Only to give the sermon,” he stipulated.

“I shall celebrate the Mass myself. I would like you to give the sermon just as you are. There will be a goodly number of people, and it is my whim that you should be heard once from the pulpit. It will come with a new authority. Besides,” he added, with a twinkle in his eye, “I should like to have some of our priests hear it. It might not be a bad thing for the Nuncio himself.”

And thus, before he departed, Robert Annys had given his promise to deliver the sermon on the following Sunday at Ely.

The Bishop did not yet acknowledge himself defeated. Well he knew the magnetism of the wonderful old church. Well he knew that men did not preach before three thousand souls in Ely Minster and then lightly step forth on their way again.

III

THE following Sunday a great concourse of people flocked to the Cathedral. There was much curiosity concerning the sermon of the poor priest. Many who for years had been accustomed on the plea of ill-health or old age to ask for a stave for support during the long service, now passed by the doorkeeper oblivious of everything save their desire to secure a good place in which to stand.

To begin with, sermons were growing infrequent. In some churches they had fallen into complete disuse, and it had been necessary for the "Father Bishops" to enjoin "upon all those that had under them the cure of souls openly in English upon Sundays to preach and teach them that they know God Almighty."

And even when there was a sermon, it frequently turned out to be upon some light and immoral bit from Ovid or Boccaccio taken as a text, while the people hungered for the words of the Gospel. Or perhaps some formal schoolman would preach upon the seven works of mercy, or the seven spiritual sins: "Pride — that lyking of

office and high state, Envy—that sorrowe at the syte of welefare and ioy, Anger—that wykkyde stirrynge of herte, Gluttony—that lufe in taste of mete and drynke, Covetousness, Sloth, and Lechery,”—to which last were always tacked on for good measure,—“Fornication, Adultery, and Incest.”

Holy Father! of what use was it to hear a description of these sins. They were familiar enough to all. What they wanted was some hope and comfort in their daily life, some counsel in their daily struggles, some love to help them bear their daily burdens. And it was pretty certain that the poor priest would give them that. When at last a priest approached the altar and lit the tall wax candles, full three thousand persons were glad that their patient wait was at an end.

The ringing of the great bells of the Cathedral and the breaking forth of the organ into sound announced the arrival of the Bishop. The stately procession appeared, blazing a sinuous path of light and color through the dim spaces of the chancel. First came an acolyte bearing the censer, followed by the cross-bearer carrying the great cross and escorted on either side by boys with tall lighted tapers in their hands. After them followed the entire body of clergy, the

Bishop, resplendent in his robes, leaning slightly upon the two assistant deacons who accompanied him. In his left hand he held the beautiful pastoral staff, while the right hand was somewhat elevated, as was meet, to bless such of the faithful as might come upon his way. In the midst of all the splendor of violet and gold and swaying lights walked one slender figure in plain russet sacking, a living protest against all the pomp and magnificence that surrounded him.

Impressive figure! No buskins of cloth of gold on those feet, no annice of pure white linen about his head, no long linen albe reaching to his heels, no girdle of white tasselled silk. From those slender shoulders hung no dalmatic gorgeous with embroidered border, nor graceful chasuble of fine velvet studded with rare pearls. Only a simple, bareheaded, poor priest in a garb which had become a familiar sight enough in the fields of harrowed earth or among the rows of waving corn, but here in the Cathedral a strange prophetic figure, portending the beginning of the end—the end of a priesthood that would act *before* the people, the beginning of a priesthood that would act *for* the people; the end of the sway of the mortmain with its icy touch of the past, the beginning of the sway of

the living hand, red with the quickly flowing blood, warm with the throbbing sense of the fellowship of man.

Through the hearts of the vast congregation the solemn service swept, majestic, sublime, stupendous in its power. Power? Everything spoke of power. Power, power, power—the power of the lesser clergy, the power of deacons and archdeacons, the power of Bishops and Archbishops, the power of the Papal Legate, the power of the Pope, the power of Mighty—Imperial Rome. What though the note of the prayers was always humility? What knew the people of the Latin words that rose to Heaven? What though the exquisitely intoned phrases of the Bishop were all a self-confessed unworthiness to appear before the Lord? There was none of it observable in the stately motions of the celebrant. What though he cast himself upon his knees and cried out, “I am an unclean sinner! Oh, wash me, dear Lord, from all the stains of sin”? What the people saw was a proud prelate in superb dalmatic, wearing a golden mitre and carrying a jewelled crozier. To them he was the great Bishop of Ely, Peer of the realm, Lord of many towns, holder of many manors, possessor of ten great palaces of residence.

Little by little the people's part in the service had shrunk, until now the Mass was frankly but a great and magnificent spectacle performed before them, the choir and the clergy taking upon themselves the responses that once had been the duty of the congregation. It was well for the people to know when to kneel, when to bow the head, and when to genuflect. Also it was well to remember that the devil writes down every word said during Mass. Every one knew by heart the tale which St. Augustine related to St. Gregory the Great, of the two chattering women and the fiend. And it was well to know that a special indulgence is granted to all that kiss the ground when the Mass is ended.

As the beautiful service took its course, the young poor priest, who had come with a sneer on his lips, found himself more profoundly stirred than he would have liked to confess—even to himself. While in the sacristy, he had been disgusted at the levity of the priests who stood about in evident indifference while the Bishop was being most augustly invested. Small wonder that they wearied of the infinitude of detail performed before their eyes week after week without variation of a motion or a word. It was the supreme genius of Rome to enforce obedience to its slight-

est demand. It was beyond even that genius to infuse life into the performance. Annys looked about him during the investiture with a sickening sense of the futility of it all. From the putting on of the sandals to the last act of handing the Bishop his beautifully embroidered gloves (the deacon handing him the right one, the subdeacon the left one) there must be no one prayer or form omitted. The prelate must be surrounded by eight acolytes upon their knees, the acolytes and deacons who touch the episcopal vestments must first wash their hands, the acolytes must elevate the vestments, then they are solemnly passed over to the deacons who do the actual enrobing. As the Bishop receives each one of the nine different articles, he must kiss each one and then murmur the appropriate prayer for each.

What had all this to do with the telling of “Christ and him crucified?” Alack for the holy Church of Christ!

Yet, once within the noble interior of the Cathedral, it was impossible not to fall completely under the sway of the wonderful Art that had squandered itself, not alone on the general conception, but on each slightest detail of arch or pillar, so that the least touch of the humblest stonemason revealed the presence of Genius.

The mind was caught up and lifted to God by the exquisite delicacy and grace of execution. If it was but the carving of a single oak leaf, it was done so that the breath of the woods stirred in the perfect turning of the serrated edge.

And the ponderous, throbbing voice of the organ, how it overwhelmed him! And the angelic sweetness of the trained boy voices, how it thrilled through him! The tears rose to his eyes. He was in the presence of a Beauty, of a Harmony, the very faintest shadow of which he could not possibly have conceived. His will lay dormant, a kind of stupor of deadly sweetness crept over him. Not one sense that was not subjugated, not one emotion that was not played upon. There crept into his heart a whisper that perhaps after all there was something in religion that was not summed up in just a man and a book. Emotions hitherto unknown thrilled through him as he sat there with the wonderful service going on about them. Once he came unexpectedly in contact with the coarse sacking of his gown, and raged against the harsh touch ; he wanted to feel silk and linen between his fingers.

“Benedicamus Patri et Filio : cum Spiritu Sancto,”
the sweetish fumes of the incense penetrated

through the vast edifice. He forgot his dislike of the pagan custom.

“Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis”

rang out from the choir, while the strong chords of the organ filled the great spaces and made them vibrate. His soul swooned in exaltation.

“Laudamus te, Benedicimus te, Adoramus te, Glorificamus te.”

Yes, yes, he adored. He must have been mad to refuse to spend his life ever within this glorious Minster, ever within sight of these beautiful vistas, ever within hearing of these heavenly sounds. He would go immediately after the service to the Bishop and confess his error. Fool, fool that he had been to hesitate. Was it now too late? Would the Mass never be over that he could fling himself once again before the Bishop?

“O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, grant us peace.”

Yes, peace, peace at any price. That was all that his soul now yearned for. Could anything be more divine than that exquisite refrain?

“Agnus Dei.”

Could the most hardened sinner listen unmoved to that celestial music? He recalled the words of the Bishop — the savage wolves of the north

pausing in the face of this — the great, visible, tangible power of the Spirit. Oh, he could not wait to confess to the Bishop how foolish and stiff-necked he had been. He, Robert Annys, could be the Archdeacon of Ely and he had refused it.

And yet, accompanying the strong emotional exaltation, there came slowly over him a sense of helplessness, as if a net were closing tightly down over him, until there was no escape from its entangling meshes. He felt the awful eye of Rome upon him, the eye before which Barbarian chiefs, and Emperors as well, had quailed. It was not alone that the Papal Legate sat there before him, the presence of Rome was felt in every one of the countless forms of the Rubric. In the ringing of the sacring bell, here twice, there thrice ; the position of the deacon and the subdeacon as the celebrant chants the Introit ; the kissing and the incensing of the various articles that are used in the service, the facing of the altar here, and the facing of the congregation there ; the putting on of the mitre and the taking it off ; the angle of the body in the various degrees of bowing ; the precise position of the second and third fingers ; the placing of the veil over the host, slightly lower on the right than on the left side ; and finally the giving of the left cheek for the kiss of peace.

So much, so very much to come from the simple rule: "Love your neighbors as yourselves."

He could not but think of that proud boast of the Roman general, Scipio Africanus, "It is ever our fate that conquered, we conquer."

Did Rome ever more truly conquer than when apparently she lay crushed and helpless before the triumphant Church of Christ? Had not the Holy Roman Church (mark the very name!) of the fourteenth century far more in it of pagan Rome than of Hebraic Nazareth? Was there no one to tell those people gathered there that all these stately processions bringing with them light and color into the twilight of the churches, these swaying banners of gorgeous design, these choir boys in violet robes, these tall, solemn-faced priests resplendent in their vestments—all had been employed centuries before to delight and subjugate the Roman populace? Did they not know that these same triumphal trains had wound their way through gayly decorated streets to the temples of the immortal gods? The incense that was swayed so solemnly in the jewelled censers, did they suspect that this same sweet odor once rose at the feet of Roman idols? Did they dream—these simple, confiding people—that even the holy water itself was compounded

from a heathen recipe? that even the very halos about their saints were copied from the statue of the wicked Nero, where it had symbolized the glory of the sun? that the devotion paid to the Pope had been received by Caligula, even down to the kissing of his toe?

The entire organization of the Holy Roman Church, what was it but the organization of Imperial Rome changed merely in nomenclature?

He looked at the resplendent figure of the Bishop: each scrap of the episcopal vestments bore its special significance — the sandals signifying purity, their red bows the patience of martyrs, the girdle symbolizing continency, the two points or horns of the mitre standing for the knowledge of the two Testaments — and so on through every detail — the annice which was wound about the neck being a very encyclopædia of symbolism, standing for five distinctly different things.

His eye rested a long time upon that wonderful insignia of office, the pastoral staff, symbolically shaped on the lines of a shepherd's crook. The staff was of enamelled gilt copper terminating in an ivory crook upon which was an exquisitely carved figure of the Virgin. About the knop were four compartments each containing a figure illustrative of the history of David, while above

these were representations of the six vices overcome by the same number of virtues, a pleasant microcosm (which could scarcely be said to be symbolic of the larger life on earth) where Faith overcame Idolatry, Chastity conquered Impurity, Charity swept away Envy, Temperance subdued Gluttony, Bounty dispelled Avarice, and Peace did away with Strife.

And was he to concern himself with all this — give up his freedom to become a kind of prompter to the Bishop? For the Archdeacon must see to it that no slightest duty of the celebrant is overlooked, that this part of the Gospel is read on the north side of the altar and that part on the east side, and see that his arms are extended here and withdrawn there.

No, no, after all, his religion was of a totally different kind.

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.”

Surely nothing could be simpler. Surely the religious life foreshadowed by these words of Christ could take no thought of the countless forms thrown together and ossified by the Hierarchy.

When the moment came for the delivery of the sermon he arose with a new courage, his

languor entirely thrown off. For as he faced the vast congregation these words were ringing in his heart:—

“For Christ made never no cathedrals
Ne with him was no cardinals.”

IV

FOR his text, Annys chose the words of Paul:—

“And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or wisdom. . . . For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. . . . And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit of power.”

From this, he proceeded to lash the preacher of the day, who, if he deigned at all to quote the words of the Gospel, was so taken up with the manner of his discourse that the matter seemed of small import. And if such an one read the Gospel of Christ, he must load each sentence with evidences of his own learning, distort each saying to show off his own cleverness, so that he doth liken himself more to a mountebank who contorts himself before a crowd to earn its applause and catch its pennies, than to a sober minister of God. He held to it stubbornly that to tell of Christ and Him crucified, to spread the knowledge of “Goddes Lawe,” was the chief mission of Holy Church, and that to live by the Gospel was complete salvation, without the observance of certain forms set up by man.

"For sure it is," he said, "that they do punish more the men who trespass against the Pope's bulls, than those who trespass against Christ's • Gospel."

Bold words, these! Words that caused the priests to writhe in their seats and cast meaning glances at one another. The clearest Lollardry, this! Forsooth! this one ragged priest to set himself up against Ecumenical Councils, Synods of the Holy Church, Decretals, Canons, Rubrics, Curias, Popes; against the whole Hierarchy with its hundreds of priests, its thousands of Masses, its hundreds of thousands of worshippers; with the strength of empires behind it, and the prestige of the Imperial City,—this one ragged priest!

Cardinal Barsini, the Papal Legate, could scarce restrain his rage. How dared Thomas of Ely to offer high office to this stirrer-up of sedition and heresy? Thomas of Ely, forsooth! this canny Bishop will bear close watching. To be sure, he had proved himself a very watch-dog of the funds of the Church, and thus very useful to his Holiness the Pope while the greedy Barons had been making their onslaughts on the Church's Treasury. Yet this same prelate had been most outspoken in his belief that these same moneys should be spent for the good of the English Church, and

not for the carrying on of foreign wars. “English money must not help England’s enemies,” was the cry of the Bishop and his followers. Basta! dangerous theories, these, to be crushed down with a strong hand. And what nonsense was this insolent poor priest prating of? — the simplification of the priestly office was just what the priesthood did not want. If it were necessary merely to read the Gospel without explaining and interpreting it, why, be a clerk and have done with it. The aloofness, the dignity, the power of the clergy would fall away instanter, the very fabric of the Church Visible would crumble away before their eyes.

While they fumed and bit their lips, the deep, melodious voice of the young poor priest rang through the church: —

“‘And about this time there arose no small stir concerning the way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines of Diana, brought no little business unto the craftsmen; whom he gathered together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this business we have our wealth. And ye see and hear that Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that there be no gods, which are made with our hands: and there is danger that this our trade come into disrepute.’

“Now the priest that says unto himself, ‘Behold, if the mere words of Christ contain all of religion,

what need is there for me?' is like unto that Demetrius of old who feared to lose his trade of making the silver gods. Shall we, then, continue to place Imagery and Incense above the words of Christ in order that the priestly trade fall not into disrepute? Verily, to understand and teach the word of Christ requires not such great learning; it has been once understood by simple fishermen. Now we are all more eager to appear versed in the writings of the Fathers, than in the words of Christ Jesus. The opinion of commentators hath grown to exceed in importance the opinion of Him who is commented upon. To know Athanasius and Jerome and Augustine is placed above knowing just Christ, and Him crucified. O my friends, help me bring back the Church to Christ Jesus—help me bring her back to the fountain head of inspiration that she may be baptized anew in the reviving waters."

There was an instant's silence, and then through the vast interior there sighed the exquisite benediction:—

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."

And slowly the people dispersed and went their several ways.

Long after the great church was empty, the young poor priest remained before the altar, bowed in prayer. He prayed fervently for light. He tried to fasten his mind upon the one essential question: Could he be of greater service to the people as a poor priest going from town to town, with the illimitable heavens, the waving trees, the only cathedral; or as Archdeacon of the great church of Ely, preaching a weekly sermon, helping the Bishop reform abuses, investigating monasteries, probing into the administrations of abbots, visiting infrequently the scattered villages within his diocese, striving to hold the people within the Church? Perhaps he could prove to them that not with all Churchmen —

“The poor to pill is all their pray ;”
that there were exceptions to those described in
the popular satire: —

“The pope maketh bishops for earthly thanke,
And nothing at all for Christ’s sake,
Such that been full fat and ranke,
To soul-heale none heed they take.”

Perhaps, after all, as the Bishop had suggested, his mission lay in stemming the tide of scorn and distrust that was turning the people away from Holy Church. After all, it was a stirring thought. The sermon delivered, his whole being quivered

with a new-born sense of power. The delight of swaying great multitudes was upon him. The pomp and pride of the place had entered into his veins. A mighty ambition swept through him which was by no means a mere carnal desire after great wealth or position. It was not that he craved the Bishopric of Ely with its ten palaces of residence scattered through Hertfordshire, Huntingtonshire, and Cambridgeshire, as well as on the isle of Ely. It was not that he longed to ride forth in state with banners flying and men arrayed in his livery, and the arms of the See blazoned on many a shield. Well was he familiar with the sight of the arms of the noble house to which Thomas of Ely belonged: Quarterly, first and fourth gules a Lion rampant Or; second and third Checquy Or and Azure; all within a Bordure engrailed Argent. These he displayed beside the arms of the See of Ely. But it was the power that went with the state that bit into him, the sitting in Westminster Hall as a Peer of the realm, and framing laws for the good of the land. Once Bishop of Ely (for he knew the archdeaconate was but a step preparatory to that), who could tell but the great See of Canterbury might be his some day, and with it the Primacy of all England? Primate of England, Adviser of the King. Ay!

and more than Adviser, for when Kings were weak and Primates strong, who, then, was the true Ruler of the Realm? The great names of the English Primacy rushed through his mind: Theodore the monk of Tarsus, who had been first to lift the throne of Canterbury above all the others, and Dunstan, Abbot of Glastonbury, and Anselm, Lanfranc, adviser to the Conqueror, and Theobald and Thomas Beket, all men who had shaped the policy of England as truly as ever King had done. And once Primate of England, who knew but a second Englishman might come to sit in the chair of St. Peter? Even so, he the poor student, arriving ten years before at Oxford with not a groat in his possession and with only a few rags to hide the garment of haircloth which he had promised his mother to wear on Fridays and fast-days, he the unknown student might rise to be Vicar of Christ, Supreme Pontiff, Successor of the Prince of Apostles! Stranger things than that had happened — was not the present Pope, Urban VI, but a coarse Italian peasant, Bartholommeo Prignano by name? Was not the great Hildebrand himself the son of a Tuscan carpenter? The sons of carpenters had played a not unimportant part in the history of the Church.

Pope! what tumultuous thoughts swept through

him with the very name! What visions of Majesty, of Power, of Imperial Might! The full title he rolled upon his tongue: Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Jesus Christ, Successor of the Prince of Apostles, Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, Patriarch of the West, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Sovereign of the Temporal Dominion of the Holy Roman Church.

Pope, Pappa, or *Father*. Even then there came to him the recognition that, after all, that was the proudest title of them all — Father of the People. Protector! What could Archbishop or Primate more than to obey that beautiful mandate of the Saviour, “Feed my lambs”?

Indeed, too often had the Pope tried rather to fleece them than to feed them, so that a Mediæval wit was led to remark that the Papal staff should be shaped as a pair of shears, rather than as a shepherd’s crook. But he, Robert Annys, once Pope, he would enforce Reform, he would bring back the Holy Spouse to its lost purity and singleness of purpose; with his indomitable energy he would wage a merciless war on that terrible Antichrist, Robert of Geneva, who, under the name of Clement VII, was holding shameful court at Avignon. With relentless hand he would put

down Simony and Licentiousness ; he would put a stop to one prelate holding more than one See. Above all, he would seek to spiritualize the Church, so that men might know that temporal power was not its true life, for, as the popular song had it :—

“ Christ bad Peter keepe his sheepe,
Swerde is no toole with sheep to keepe.

* * * * *

Holy Churches rich clothing shall be rightwiseness ;
Her treasure true life shall be ;
Charity shall be her richesse ;
Her lordship shall be unite ;
Hope in God her honeste ;
Her vessel clean conscience ;
Poore in spirit and humilitie —
Shall be Holy Churches defence.”

And yet other Popes had started with such noble intentions. Who knows but perhaps the man who holds a thousand thousand reins between his fingers may not, in the end, find that, instead of being the driver, he is really being driven ? There was the proudest Pope the world knew, Gregory VII, the indomitable Hildebrand, whose power seemed to have no bounds,—what was his end ? A lonely death in exile, with one enemy crowned Emperor and another established as his successor in the throne of Rome.

The Bishop waited for his answer. He stood at the parting of the ways. Clearly he must decide without further delay. Perhaps this very indecision was but a sign of the dangers of coming within the spell of the Church. Perhaps this stirring desire to keep within, this fierce ambition which struggled in his breast for mastery, was but a new temptation of the Evil One to lure him into Vanity and a Love of Power for its own sake. Oh, if only on the one side lay the path of perfect right-doing, and on the other the path of evil-doing, how easy were the decision. But, alas! the devil works not in that way. He so mixes up the good with the evil, and the evil with the good, that one knows not which way to turn.

What should he answer to the Bishop? Was he strong enough to stand alone, with only the Bible in his hand, and say in the face of Bishops and Archbishops, Cardinals, Legates, the Pope himself: "Man needs not all these offices and ceremonials, these stately places of worship, these Bishops' palaces. Man should live by the Book alone; then would there be no need for priests to shrive or Popes to anathematize"? The Pope—the people did not need him:—

"What knoweth a tillour at the plow the popes name?"

He sought the answer in prayer. He implored fervently for some miracle to show him the divine way. Hours passed, and still he remained there before the altar, bowed in prayer. The shadows in the great interior changed places as the sun travelled its course. Where in the morning the sun had glorified great windows of painted glass, there now rested cold gloom; what had stood out white and clear now hid itself in shadow; a weird procession of the Apostles and Virgins and Saints took place, one after another silently emerging from dim recesses, and after standing out for a while white and clear-cut, slowly fading away into the gray walls.

Still Annys prayed.

On the altar lay the Gospels beautifully bound in gold. To the Book's ornamentation went twenty sapphires, six emeralds, eight topazes, eight salmandine stones, eight garnets, and twelve pearls. Annys could not but think of the cheeks he had seen that morning sunken from hunger. He could not but reflect how many mouths those jewels might have fed. His eyes fell upon the cruet which contained the consecrated oil. It was enclosed in an exquisitely jewelled reliquary of finest silver gilt; the curtains of the altar were of blue cloth of tissue, with images of the Crucifixion.

fixion most delicately embroidered on it. Something seemed to whisper within him that Jesus Christ, could He now look on the condition of His Church to-day, would not approve of all the splendor within, while without men died by the hundred for lack of brotherly service. He prayed for light. How would Christ have acted? Would He have been persuaded to take high office within the Sanhedrim, and not go down among His people who waited for Him? Surely not. Could all the gilt and glory of Solomon's temple have made Him forsake the cross? No, a thousand times no! O for some manifestation of the divine will that would make clear his way beyond peradventure!

“Grant it, dear Lord, for the sake of Thy Son who died on the rood.”

Far up over the altar, above the most beautiful reredos in all England, stood the patient Christ looking down upon him. On either side, slightly lower, stood the solemn figures of Moses and Elijah. The arches in which they stood were supported by shafts of alabaster curiously entwined with spiral belts of agates and crystals on a golden ground. On the reredos was the sculptured story of the wonderful life, the entry into Jerusalem, washing the feet of the disciples, the Last Sup-

per, the Agony in the Garden, and finally, Bearing the Cross ; yet the central figure of the Christ, high up in its gable, easily dominated all. Majestic as were the figures of the prophets, there was a certain simpler majesty of the Christ that appealed more intimately to the human soul.

The patient Christ looked down upon the kneeling form, and to the tired eyes of the young priest, it seemed that He smiled upon him. He saw the gentle lips move and heard a low whisper :—

“ Patience, dear son. Have I not pleaded with My Father, ‘ Lord, Lord, I came not to earth, that these great cathedrals be reared, nor that superbly robed priests genuflect before My image ’ ?

“ Nevertheless, I have faith that surely the time will come when the hearts of the people are ripe for the knowledge of Me. If the Lord hath seen to it that the seeds of the flowers are blown by the winds of heaven at the appointed time and scattered into the fields that await their coming, surely He will see that My words yet fall on fertile soil.”

Annys sprang to his feet, and gazing into the face of the Christ, cried ecstatically :—

“ But is the appointed time now come ? Am I the one to scatter the seed and cause it to fall

upon the right soil? Oh, vouchsafe me a sign, a sign, dear Lord, to show me the way."

For answer, softly there crept into the shadowed apse the faint sound of voices, as of many men chanting a hymn, but far, far away. Slowly it gathered in strength until it touched the walls of the great church and made them speak, ever growing stronger and stronger until at last the words could be distinguished, and the whole vast interior rang with the refrain :—

"Jack Miller asketh help to turn his mill aright.
He hath grounded small, small, small :
The King's Son of Heaven He shall pay for all.
Look thy mill go aright with the four sails,
And the post stand with steadfastness."

And then the stirring call :—

"With right and with might
With skill and with will ;
Let might help right,
And skill go before will
And right before might
So goeth our mill aright."

The face of Annys was transfigured with joy, for well he knew the song to be one that passed from lip to lip among the followers of John Ball. It was the call of the People, the defiant song

of the down-trodden, law-ridden, priest-ridden People.

“A sign! a sign!” he cried exultantly, and rushed out into the Square.

V

WHERE three roads from the neighboring villages met, there was formed a great open space in which a thousand or more persons could easily find room without crowding. Here had gathered together the people, eager to see and hear their beloved leader, John Ball.

While Ball was resting at the tavern, after his long tramp, the crowd amused itself welcoming vociferously the late comers, cracking jokes, and singing songs. A tall fellow made his way among them, crying:—

“Busk ye, busk ye, John Ball hath rung your bell. God do bote, for now is tyme.”

“By my troth, then, it will be heard from one end of England to the other!” exclaimed a powerfully built, fierce-looking dyer, whose hands, stained a purplish red by his trade, added to his sanguinary appearance.

“ ‘Tis fairly so. We shall yet all be free men,” agreed a mild-mannered, lanky youth, with a slight halt in his speech.

“Here come John the cobbler, and Will the

tinker, both as sober as owls," called out a youngster.

"Ho, John, John, thy lass will turn a cold front on thee, and thou smooth not the frown on thine ugly phiz!" cried one who was blue with the cold, and danced about first on one foot and then the other to keep his blood circulating.

A short distance from him, a long-nosed, peaked-faced chap, a bit unsteady on his legs, was haranguing a group.

"Here's a nut to crack," he was saying; "who can answer me this: What do the priests prefer over Luke, Mark, and the Book?"

"Nay, then, not I," snarled one who was in no mood for conundrums, "not I, seeing that I cannot boast thy wit, Simon Lackless."

Lackless grinned broadly and placed one lean finger to his long nose, waggishly. "Why, 'tis fair enough," he said; "the priests do prefer Lucre to Luke, Marks to Mark, and the Bag to the Book."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the people about him, passing the joke along from one to the other.

But Lackless had not overlooked the sneer; he now pointed to the speaker and called out in a loud voice, "Poor Wat! We must forgive him, seeing he is so meek at home and must vent his cooped-up spleen on some one!"

Wat sought another part of the crowd, discomfited.

"I wot a good saw," exclaimed an old man, leaning heavily on a staff; "but there, do not ask me for it, for my sides ache with laughing a'ready."

But they would not let him off. "Come now, let's have it," they begged. Some laughed outright from sympathy with the old man's merriment.

"What think ye, what think ye—oh, Lord!" he spluttered. "What think ye, they do say at Rome?"

"They do say 'Aves' in plenty, for all the good they do us," grumbled one. But no one else ventured to solve the riddle.

"Why, it is 'Give and it shall be given unto you,'" the old man said, chuckling in his high, cracked treble.

The crowd laughed heartily.

"Ay! 'and moch they take, and give but small,'" sang out an impish lad, who had jumped on the back of a comrade and was pummelling him lustily.

"Aiee! Aiee!" cried the under one.

A wrathy butcher jerked the fellow off the other's back and smacked him soundly for his

pains. "Off with you! One would think a mountebank was coming instead of John Ball!"

There were others who felt as he did. Beneath all the fun there flowed an undercurrent of earnestness, and many there were who spoke no word, but gazed grimly before them, seemingly lost in thought.

Suddenly some one started a song to while away the time:—

"Earth out of earth is wonderfully wrought."

Others immediately joined in:—

"Earth from earth has got dignity of naught."

When the last stanza was reached, six hundred voices trolled it defiantly forth:—

"Earth upon earth would be a king ;
But how that earth shall be earth's thinks he no thing :
Earth upon earth wins castles and towers,
Then says earth unto earth 'this is all ours.' "

Then a thin boyish treble started a mocking song on the great state of the priests. They did not suffer him to sing alone, but took it up eagerly with him:—

"Priestes high on horse willeth ride
In glitterande gold of great array,
Ipainted and portred all in pride
No common knight may go so gay ;

Change of clothing every day,
With golden girdles great and small ;
As boisterous as is beare at bay."

But now John Ball was seen making his way through the throng. As the people pressed together to let him pass, benedictions and glances of true affection followed him; and he, catching sight here and there of some known face, nodded cheerily, first on one side and the other. For the people loved him, and called him "Saviour"; it was only the Churchmen that spoke of him as "the mad priest of Kent."

In the centre of the square stood a great tall cross of stone with the head very beautifully carved with a crucifix in the middle of leafage work, and with wide stone steps, octagonal in shape, leading to it. When Ball reached these steps, he mounted to the very top and stood there looking down with a quiet smile upon the upturned faces before him. He stood there, a powerfully built, tall, big-boned figure in the well-known, reddish brown, coarse garb of his order, a veritable tower of strength physical as well as spiritual, and looking as if he knew his own strength and gloried in it. A ring of dark hair surrounded his priest's tonsure; his nose was big, but clean-cut and with wide nostrils; his shaven

face showed a longish upper lip and a big but blunt chin; his mouth was big and the lips closed firmly. A face not very noteworthy but for the gray eyes, well opened and wide apart, at times lighting up his whole face with a kindly smile, at times set and stern, or now and then resting in that look as if they were gazing at something a long way off, as do the eyes of the poet or enthusiast.

Shout after shout broke from the throng as he stood there calmly looking down upon them. When at last there was silence, he was not suffered to speak, for of a sudden a man standing immediately next to the cross unfurled a banner which swung out in the breeze. Only a smallish banner with a peculiar device upon it: merely a picture of a man and a woman rudely clad and with bare legs and feet seen against a background of green trees, the man holding a spade, the woman a distaff and spindle, rudely enough drawn, yet with great spirit and meaning. Underneath were the written words:—

“When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?”

A tremulous murmur arose that soon swelled into a great huzza. The thrill of enthusiasm ran

like threads of fire from man to man. Again and again, Huzza! Huzza!

A prosperous merchant, stopping curiously on the edge of the crowd, pointed to the banner. "That comes," he said, "of putting Holy Writ 'twixt the fingers of every swineherd."

His companion, an alderman from Norwich, smiled. "Ah, can one wonder that they cry Ball with Book and Bell? If they press the gospel into daily life, there's no telling what will happen!"

Annys, coming from the dim twilight of the Cathedral, looked about him at first in bewilderment. He stood on the outer edge of the throng, apart and gazing with interest at the scene. He felt himself not yet attuned to the bright picture before him, full of color and light and life. But slowly the true significance of it all sank into him. The very brightness and color of the scene was in itself symbolic. Here all took place in the open air; the sun, although near the end of its course, yet threw into sharp contrast the dark fringe of trees that encircled the outskirts of the cross-roads. The air was pure and fresh and smelled of the sea and the salt marshes, awakening every faculty with a tingling sense of life and activity. It was so different, ah, how different, from the heavy,

incense-laden air of the dim Cathedral! That was an atmosphere which dulled one's senses and soothed them to sleep. The gay mass of moving color as the people swayed this way and that, the goodly brown soil, the living green of the earth,—how good it all was! He could look up and see, from where he stood, the stately tower of Ely and the smaller tower of the Lantern etched grandly against the sky. Beautiful as the proud Minster was, even as he looked at it, he felt that its power must wane from the moment that this new religion of the poor priests took firm hold of the people. The Cathedral stood for a religion of secluded cloisters, a standard of living for monks and priests; but Ball stood for a religion for the whole broad earth, a standard of living for the men and women who did the work of the world.

And Ball spoke and said:—

“ Fellow-men, a price is on my head. Well wist I that even at this moment the Archbishop's men are awaiting until I come into their power to clap me into Maidstone gaol.”

A threatening murmur ran through the crowd, and many a man fingered his bow, and such as had them, clapped hand to sword or studied the points of their daggers fondly.

"Yea, that wist I — there be but little time left me to talk to you, so I must hasten. The men of Kent have sent for me, and I am on my way to them, although I doubt if I can have speech with them before the gaolers have me in irons. Yet the men have need of me, and I go. I am not the first preacher of God's word to be hunted by tyrants. Was not our dear Lord, Jesus Christ, summoned again and again to appear before the authorities to defend Himself on the charge of disturbing the public peace? Was not likewise the Apostle Paul persecuted? And there were others, but it is not of them that I came to speak to you to-day. I come to tell ye wherein I am a disturber of the public peace, wherein I am justly dubbed a 'pestilent fellow,' as Ananias the high priest dubbed Paul. Yea, verily, I am a pestilent fellow of the sect of the Nazarenes, going about the land sowing the seeds of discontent and rebellion. And I take glory unto myself for the name. For surely if ye bide content with such a lot as yours — if ye remain satisfied with homes of wattled reeds and mud, and do not rebel that oxen and horses should be better cared for than such as were made in the image of God, — then would ye not deserve the name of Men. The people are grow-

ing tired of calling upon the high priests of the Church to reform themselves. My brethren, the time hath come when Reform must come from below and not above, must come from the people and no Pope. The people are not schismatic, the people are not over-luxurious."

A sardonic grin swept over many faces, and some broke out into loud guffaws at this sally.

"The people are not covetous, nor greedy, nor lustful, nor ever grasping for new powers. Nay, verily, I ask you to listen to the words of the Apostle Paul, and tell me who come nearer to the ideal held up therein — the priests or the people?

"‘And behold, we live; as chastened and not killed; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.’"

"The people, the people," they shouted lustily.

"Ha!" cried one fellow to another, "of the priests we may well say — they live, as unchaste and lively; as rich, yet making others poor; as having everything, and yet wishing more."

"In truth!" answered his companion; "but stay, he begins again."

"The people," went on Ball, "seek Christ, but they are a-weary of seeing Religion walk in the

market-place, a buyer among buyers, a ruler among rulers, a tyrant among tyrants."

"That's true as Holy Writ," shouted one great fellow, enthusiastically, and many took up the cry:—

"As true as Holy Writ!"

"The people desire priests who will come among them and work among them, even as did the Apostles. Why am I put beyond the pale of the Church save that, instead of concerning myself with unravelling the tangles of canonical lore, I seek to unravel the tangles of life? Sure all that is needed to do priestly service is to love much, for hath not St. John said:—

"'He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him'?

"And what is love, I ask ye, but good-fellowship? Ah, cherish that word fellowship, my brethren, for without fellowship be assured Christ cannot enter among you: for without fellowship every one standeth for his own lusts, and the strong wax yet stronger, and the weak are pressed to the wall and grow yet weaker and die. But where fellowship entereth among you there entereth Christ also — the strong shares his strength with the weak, and the oppressed arise and lift up their heads. We are told much, fellow-men,

of the states of heaven and hell, we are told of the blessings of heaven and the horrors of hell; but lay it well to heart what I tell you,—friendship is heaven and lack of fellowship is hell—fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death. In hell, one shall cry on his fellow to help him, and shall find that therein is no help because there is no fellowship, but every man for himself. Therefore I tell you that the proud, despiteous rich man, though he knoweth it not, is in hell already, because he hath no fellow."

And his voice sank solemnly away and the people brooded in silence over what they had heard. And perhaps there came over the speaker a sudden thought of the cold, dark dungeon where he would soon lie chained, away from his people whom he so dearly loved, away from the open air and the sunlight and the shadows of clouds sweeping over the fields. And his head sank for an instant upon his breast, and as he spoke again there was a slight tremble in his voice, though he tried hard to throw it off: —

"Had I but kept my tongue between my teeth I might have been some personage, if but a parson of a town, and men would have spoken well of me; and all this I have lost for the lack of a word here and there to some great man, and

a little winking of the eyes amidst murder and wrong and unruth. Now it is too late, the hemp for me is sown and grown and heckled and spun."

"Nay, nay," a strong voice cried, "we shall march upon the gaol and demand you of the Archbishop himself. We shall come fifty thousand strong, and we shall burst down the gaol if he refuse us."

"His head shall yet decorate a post and you shall live to see it," shouted another daring soul. His remark was greeted with cheers.

Ball held up one hand for silence, a great light of love irradiating his face.

"Ay, fear not that I have wrought all these years in vain. For while the great tread down the little, and strong beat down the weak, and cruel men fear not, and kind men dare not, and wise men can not, the saints in heaven bid me not forbear. I wot well because of fellowship it will not fail, though I seem to fail when the Archbishop lays his hands on me. But in the days hereafter shall I and my work yet be alive, and men be holpen by them to strive again and yet again."

And with his voice and demeanor grown solemn once more with the thought of the long wait which must be endured before they could come

together again, he uttered over them the same beautiful benediction which had arisen centuries before on the lips of Paul:—

“Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that there be no divisions among you. Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all that ye do be done in love.”

Strong men were bowed in grief, and their broad shoulders shook with sobs. The women and children straggling about the outer edge of the throng wept openly and long. But Robert Annys rushed forward and, making his way to the foot of the cross, flung himself there on his knees and cried out passionately:—

“Nay, nay, John Ball, beloved master, fear not, neither shall your work fail now, nor shall it seem to fail. For from this moment I give myself to it, body and soul. And I pledge myself to stand in your place and do whatsoever you would have me do while you are gone from us.”

An astonished silence greeted these words, for it had been pretty freely rumored that the arch-deaconate of Ely had been offered to the young poor priest, and that he would never be able to withstand the temptation to throw off the russet sacking and don the albe and stole. When it was

realized that the bribe of high office had not caused him to desert the cause of the people, the enthusiasm knew no bounds; men wrung their neighbors' hands, and tears of joy ran down bronzed cheeks. John Ball knew well that Robert Annys was a man of great power and eloquence, and he smiled gladly when he heard his earnest words. He raised the young priest to his feet, and clasped his hands warmly, and gazed long and earnestly into his face. And the people there assembled looked up at those two strong souls standing united before the cross. And because of that sight, they bade farewell to their leader less sorrowfully than if they had none other to look to for help and guidance.

VI

INTO the Bishop's chamber the Legate entered, smiling. There were many things in the turn of events that went to make up his scarce concealed satisfaction. To be sure, the times were troublous, and a grave uneasiness was over the land, yet to Pietro Barsini the end in view ever justified the means, and there was no denying that the old enemies of the Church, the Barons, were becoming wonderfully meek and approachable under the pressure of their present difficulties.

The discontent and threatened rising of the people against their overlords had thrown the Aristocracy—Bishops and Barons—into a union, or semblance of union. Both were landowners, and were absorbed in the problem of putting a man behind the plough and keeping him there. Untilled lands and rotting corn became of more importance than Rights of Mortmains, Spiritualities, Peter's Pence, Rights of Investiture, or other trifling matters over which Churchmen and Barons had quarrelled.

Thus it came about that at that time for a brief instance the lion lay down with the lamb. A true Churchman, such as was Pietro Barsini, could find much indeed to relish in the situation. Not only was the mighty English Baronage turned from an enemy into an ally, but there was the unregenerate past to do penance for. Therefore rich gifts and many altars and chantries and noble additions to cathedrals began to find their way to the Church from the repentant sinners. Many and profitable were the Plenary and Special Indulgences granted to undo the direful Past; and if perchance to the contrite purchaser redemption seemed to come a trifle high, a sight of his rotting corn, or bleating sheep, or distressed kine, speedily brought him to terms.

The Cardinal could find it in his heart almost to love some of those hardy, obstinate Barons, his new-found friends, but for the Bishop of Ely he had only unmitigated scorn. He could understand an out and out enemy, but these half enemies and half friends, these Churchmen who are ever pratting of reform from within, and who one minute are as fiercely denouncing the head of the Church, as the next they are anathematizing the heretics and would-be robbers of the Church,—these he frankly could not understand at all. Thomas of

Ely was his special detestation ; he had no patience with his absurd strictures regarding the conferring of benefices only on worthy and pious Churchmen. The Hierarchy in the eyes of the Nuncio was a vast and powerful machine of intricate workings. If one delicate part of the machine refused to work, there must be plenty of oil to lubricate it,—oil in the shape of emoluments was vastly more important to the usefulness of the machine than such abstract qualities as piety or chastity. There were certain crowned heads to be soothed, certain fierce Barons to be placated, certain wily Counts to be won over, here and there a Queen to be flattered, or a rival to be disposed of at a safe distance ; therefore there must be benefices to bestow with wise discrimination, here one in Sicily, there one in Burgundia, there one in Flanders or in France, or maybe in England.

The Cardinal inquired most considerately into the Bishop's state of health. His greeting was as smooth and affable as ever, yet the Bishop could read the malicious triumph that bubbled beneath the calm surface.

" Too bad, too bad," began his visitor, in suave tones, " that a hempen rope should be the end of so promising a youth."

" How say you ? " exclaimed the Bishop, startled.

"I say that, though we thought so cannily to have put salt on the tail of our bird, yet having left him alone in the gilded cage, he hath found it in his power to fly away."

The Bishop's dream-structure in which he had just been wandering fell to the ground with a crash. The thought of that beautiful youth by his side, enthusiastic, eloquent, fearless, assisting him, brightening his declining years, had been very sweet. Momentarily he had been expecting his arrival to be announced. And this was the end of his hopes! He was too profoundly chagrined not to show it.

"H'm!" he said, half to himself, "I had thought to bring him home with me."

"Doubtless," insinuated the Cardinal Barsini, "had he come to my Lord Bishop's hospitable mansion, he would have found the cage altogether too heavily gilded to have stirred his wings."

"He was deep in prayer. What could I?"

"Ill it behooves me to suggest. However it might have been, since it is true that he hath slipped from between our fingers, Holy Church will have to limp along as best she can without his valuable aid."

His listener winced at the irony, but returned it with interest.

"Tell me all about it, *you know all*," he said, with quiet emphasis. For well it was known that nothing happened in all the length and breadth of the land without the cognizance of the Legate. The "Pope's spy" the people nicknamed him.

"I know only that the mad priest whom you have refused to place in irons, John Ball, appeared yestere'en at the cross-roads, and as he had but just arrived and never has been known to keep his tongue long between his teeth, he straightway gave one of his seditious, incendiary harangues (though he doth call them sermons), urging his hearers to hold together against the just decrees of Parliament and the King's—"

"I know, I know," interrupted the Bishop, impatiently, "I know all you would say against this Ball, for I have heard it many times; but tell me what did take place that concerns this young Annys."

The Legate's beady eyes snapped. "And it befell that the young protégé of your Reverence was among those that listened," he concluded.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Bishop, with a long-drawn-out sigh. Well he knew how strong an influence such a man as Ball would have upon the high-spirited young priest just at that point in his career.

"And then just as Ball bade them all farewell, and announced that he was walking straight into the arms of the Archbishop's men at Kent, this hot-head of ours boldly flings himself from out the crowd, and throwing himself at Ball's feet, proclaims himself Ball's successor, and swears eternal allegiance to the Cause."

The Bishop groaned aloud: "Why are they so misguided as to persecute this Ball? It will cost Sudbury his head, this action, mark my words. If they clap him into gaol he will but come forth stronger than ever. Can they not or will they not see that their methods of repression are but heaping fuel on the fire? Can they not or will they not see that all may yet come well without violence, if their leaders are not suppressed, if there be talkings and gatherings, ay! and marchings if they will? The people have some just grievances, though, to be sure, they are greatly and criminally exaggerated; but let them talk of them, and, mark me, they will not bite near so deep. Let me tell you, and the Primate of England, ay! and the King himself, that the people are now in a mood to accept small concessions; let this go farther, and persecute them more, and thrones may tremble ere they cry 'Enough!'"

"What concessions?" asked the Legate, an-

grily. "Make concessions to the wild, turbulent mob that, given its way, will yet plant a burning torch on every palace and castle in the land!"

"Nay," gently interposed the Bishop, "it is to prevent such a rebellion that I would make just concessions *now*."

"*Just* concessions, indeed! Basta!"

"Ay," reiterated the Bishop, "*just* concessions! For it is true that the wages doled to the workers are scarce enough to keep body and soul together, and the Poll Tax, which hath been taken three times these past four years, falls heavier upon the very poor than any others. For well is it known that the rich have an argument in their purse that goeth straightway to the heart of the tax-gatherer. And mark me, my friend, you may think the people get used to the raping of their women by these same insolent tax-gatherers and sheriffs and King's men, as eels get used to being skinned. But, after all, praise to the Most High, man made in the image of God is not an eel. The nobles cannot hope to go on with impunity treading down the most sacred rights of human beings. For the spark of divinity in man cannot let him remain long at the level of beasts; and it is a spark that neither you nor Baron can quite stamp out, because it is from God."

The old man paused, and rested for a moment with his head on his hands as if weary and disengaged; but the Legate paced up and down angrily, holding his arms tightly folded before his breast, as if to shut in the bitter words that rose within him. When the old man spoke again it was at first gently, and slowly, and then, as his indignation voiced itself, the words came bubbling up hot from him, faster and faster.

"Do you not see," he said, "that the greatest danger is to be apprehended from a martyr? It was the worship of the martyrs in the secret Catacombs that knit firmly together the bones of young Christianity. Could the Holy Catholic Church ever have grown into the most powerful body in the world, had it from the very first been fed on opulence and power?"

"Yea, I have heard," sneered the Legate, trying hard to hide his rage, "that the Bishop of Ely holds it Christlike to stir up the people against all authority."

The Bishop's face grew cold and hard. "On the contrary," he began severely, "I deprecate the teachings of Ball just so far as they give rise to rebellion and disorder. I hold that the people are not ready to rule themselves; I firmly believe that were the mandates of Ball to be obeyed there

would follow disruption and chaos, for I remember the words of Paul :—

“‘I fed you with milk, not with meat, for ye were not yet able to bear it ; nay, not even now are ye able ; for ye are yet carnal, for there is among you jealousy and strife.’

“I hold that the people should be fed for yet a while with milk. I hold that they are not yet ready to bear meat; yet, Pietro Barsini, that is precisely what Ball is feeding them with. He is giving them strong meat whether they can bear it or no. Beware, Pietro Barsini, beware, for the time is coming when, once having tasted of the meat, they shall no longer remain satisfied with the milk, and, when it is held to their lips, they shall turn from it. When that time comes, look you, look you to it well, for the foundations on which such as you rest will crumble away, and not so much as one stone shall remain.”

Exhausted by his vehemence, the old man's head fell wearily on his breast, and the Italian stole noiselessly away.

VII

WHEN Robert Annys was announced, a message was sent to him, bidding him be a guest at dinner, which was just on the point of being served, and promising him private audience immediately after. So he waited in one of the stately apartments of the superb palace, and looked on the walls and ceilings, all wainscoted with oak so carefully chosen that the better part of a forest must have been sacrificed to it, and on the rich tapestries and hangings, and wondered that those calling themselves servants of God should be housed in palaces of brick and stone with ten windows to a front and three stories, one on the other, while those to whom they ministered in the name of Christ were huddled together in miserable huts of clay with roofs of moss or turf.

His host did not keep him waiting long. Almost immediately after he had cordially greeted his guest, the *maître d'hôtel* announced dinner, and the strangely mated couple made their way

to the Great Hall. The Bishop staked a good deal upon the surroundings in which Annys now found himself. He counted upon a certain refined delicacy that he noted in the poor priest, a sensitiveness to environment that would make him respond to the luxury and elegance about him. He hoped that Annys might reflect that all this power and wealth might be his if he would but stretch forth his hand, and that thereby the influence of the scene at the cross-roads might yet be overcome. But the Bishop was too late; a few hours before, and it might have seemed a goodly thing to Robert Annys to entertain in this lordly fashion, it might have seemed a Christly thing to toss discarded crusts and broken pieces of meat into a jewelled bowl that its contents might be thrown to the beggars clamoring before the gate; but now a higher conception of Christliness mastered him. He had been too profoundly moved at the cross-roads, the whole scene had come to him too directly as the answer of God to his prayer, for him to respond readily to what went on about him. Instead, a profound disgust seized upon him, a bitter contempt for this kind of Christianity, so that he could scarce restrain himself from rising and openly rebuking the Bishop for all this unseemly pomp and splendor.

They sat at the raised, or great table as it was called, facing the other tables, which were set longitudinally, and which were only boards laid upon trestles so that they could easily be removed to permit the floor to be spread with fresh rushes after the evening meal. These rushes served as a bed for all who assembled there, for the hospitality of my Lord Bishop was never questioned. Let merchants, priests, jesters, clerks, scholars from Oxford, or mummers, all lie there and welcome; to-morrow the tables would be set up again with plenty for all.

Before anything was brought in to eat, a liveried fellow knelt before each guest at the high table, holding a beautiful silver ewer filled with scented water into which to dip the hands, followed by another fellow similarly liveried who passed a soft linen napkin upon which to dry them. Then came trenchers of fresh white bread on which to place their meat, the folk below at the long tables receiving only the ordinary trenchers of wood which could be scraped to serve for many meals. Looking at these trenchers, Annys thought sadly of the miserable, coarse, black bread made of beans or coarsely pounded oats that must answer for the poor. And he thought of the sweat with which even such poor stuff must be earned.

Pondering over all this, the delicate sole, found only on the tables of the great, the fine almonds, the roasted figs, and colored sugar-plums seemed to choke him. His Piers must content himself with a dish of herrings and onions, and perhaps an infrequent bit of cheese, or still less frequent scrap of meat. He bethought him of how that great-hearted poet of the Malvern Hills had cried out that all mischief proceeds from the clergy, who ought to set an example of holy poverty, and who rather emulated the splendor of knighthood:—

“Now is religion a rider, a buyer of land as though he were a lord.”

The Bishop, reading nothing of what was going on in the poor priest’s mind, now bent toward him courteously and sought to fix his attention upon the luxury and elegance of the banquet. He deprecated to him the fact that, as it was a fast-day, he was unable to offer more bountiful hospitality. Annys could scarce restrain a smile at the ingenuity of the cook, who certainly might well have shone in a clerical career, so well did he know how to obey the letter and ignore the spirit.

For, first there was served to each guest, on being seated, a quarter of a pint of grenache.

Then came roast apples with white sugar-plums on them, roasted figs, sorrel, watercress, and rosemary. Then a soup made of trout, tenches, white herring, fresh-water eels, whiting, almonds, ginger, saffron, cinnamon powder, and sweetmeats. This was followed by soles and salmon for salt-water fish; and pike with roe, carps, and breams for fresh-water fish should they be preferred. Besides all this there were side dishes of oranges and apples, and rice with fried almonds upon it.

Fast-day forsooth! Was there not epitomized herein the very condition into which the Church of Christ had fallen, its true life blighted in the killing frost of ritualism?

When the last sugar-plum had been passed by the servitors, and the chairs and benches were shoved somewhat back from the boards, and all sat about in easy postures, the harpist up in the beautiful oriole played sweet music. A youth with a treble of thrilling sweetness sang to them of the uncertainty of this life, for the Bishop permitted no ribald love songs to be sung in his hall. Then there followed a hymn to Jesus Christ:—

“With noble meat He nourished my kind
for with His flesh He would me feed.
A better food may no man find,
for to lasting life it will us lead.”

After this came a psalm of David, set to a quaint and plaintive air ; but the Bishop, now perceiving that his guest was ill at ease, summoned a servant, and throwing him a purse of gold to be divided among the minstrels, bade Annys follow him to his solar.

Annys did so with Piers' complaint of the great Churchmen of the day ringing in his ears :—

“ With change of many manner meats,
With song and solos sitting long,
And after meat with harpe and song
And each man mote him lords call.”

When they reached the Bishop's private chamber, Thomas of Ely laid his hand kindly upon the young man's head.

“ My son,” he said, “ I have heard. Would to God it were otherwise, but I hear that thou hast seen a light and must follow it.”

Annys bowed his head gravely. Then, suddenly throwing himself upon his knees before the Bishop, he exclaimed in a broken voice :—

“ Father, I have chosen the difficult way. Help me that my feet do not falter.”

The old man was deeply moved, and stooped and embraced the young priest, who began :—

“ After the Mass in the Cathedral, I lay a long while before the altar in prayer. I knew not

whither to turn. All that you had said to me with such powerful eloquence I argued over again and again. All that had drawn me to the work of my master John Wyclif also passed again and again through my mind. I do not know how long I lay there on the cold stones, I know only that when I went out into the open, the tops of the pines were draining the last dregs of the red sun.”

He paused for an instant, and then, looking earnestly into the prelate’s face, “I preached a goodly sermon, did I not so?” he asked abruptly.

“Never before did I listen to one more timely, nor one that stirred me more profoundly.”

“Yea, I felt that. See, I hide naught from you. Yet, Father, I did not feel glad that it was given me to help others that heard me, rather was I puffed up with pride that *I* could so speak, that *I* could so touch and sway others. There stirred within me all the forces of Pride, and Love of Power for its own sake, which are the favorite minions of Satan.”

“Ah! my son, my son!”

“The mighty Minster with all its wealth of associations, with all its noble and splendid beauty, the pageantry and glory of the Mass, Father, the pulsations of the glorious organ,—

all overpowered me with a flood of self-worship. The future rose before me full of pomp and glory. I saw myself rise step by step within the Church until not one step remained above me. Not one step. I saw myself enthroned on the chair of the Apostle, I saw before me as in a vision the waiting throng in the vast plaza before St. Peter's, I heard the chanting of the Papal choir, I caught sight even of the glittering troops lining the plaza, I heard the boom of the cannons of St. Angelo firing their grand salute, and I rose up and blessed the great concourse that knelt before me. Oh, at that moment I cared naught for those people, naught for their spiritual needs; I cared only for my own aggrandizement, my own overwhelming power. Surely, then, if ever, were the spirits battling for my soul — the powers of darkness and the powers of light. The evil spirits whispered to me that I was born for power, that I was able to sway and lead men; but the gentle spirits asked me wherefore had I forsaken Christ Jesus.

“And then, Father, I prostrated myself and put my whole soul into a prayer for guidance. I implored God to grant me a sign to show me the Way of Everlasting Life.”

“Would to God I might have been with thee,

that I might have proved to thee the Way led within the Church."

"Father, that sign was vouchsafed me."

"Ah!"

"Yea, faintly there came borne in upon me, kneeling there, the sound of singing. At first I took it for the sound of angels' voices, but as it grew in strength I knew it to be the sound of many men singing, and at last I could make out the words, and I hearkened with all my heart, for clearly it was the voice of the Lord speaking through the people."

"And what was it that you heard?"

"'Jack the Miller asketh help to turn his mill aright.
He hath grounden small, small, small.'"

"Ay!" cried the Bishop, "the song of the followers of John Ball." For a moment both remained in silence, thinking over the words of the song, and then the poor priest went on with his recital:—

"I sprang to my feet, scarce offering more than a hurried prayer of thanks that the answer had been vouchsafed me, and dashed out and followed the people who were running to the cross-roads, and there I did witness a wonderful sight—nigh unto a thousand men with some women and chil-

dren gathered there to hear this John Ball, who spake to them from the steps of the stone cross."

"And what spake he?"

"Of fellowship, always of fellowship. He spake of the injustice of the rich and powerful, yet he did not try to set the poor against the rich as his enemies say he doth, but rather he told them that the rich should envy the poor, for to the poor is given fellowship which is denied the rich."

"Yea!" exclaimed the Bishop, "I doubt not that this Ball is sincere enough. He thinks he hath right on his side, yet once let the gold of the rich pour into the laps of the poor, and they will see that not only do they not use it better, but less well. My son, many are the virtues praised and glorified by men like Ball, which are, after all, but the virtues that come with poverty, which is a state of far less temptation than that of great riches. Have a care, have a care, my son, lest the poor are roused to grasp the sceptre from the rich before they are trained to wield it worthily. Have a care, if this evil day arise; it is what thy master John Wyclif hath warned thee against."

The pupil of the great scholar of Balliol for an instant hung his head, then he raised it and looked full at the Bishop. "I know well there is

danger," he said gravely, "and it will be my solemn duty to preach temperance and control to these people, to show the world that we are united in love of justice and not greed for wealth and high estate. Yet, Father, it is now clear to me that, did our Lord come to earth to-day, He would be found on the side of the rustics."

The Bishop had no doubt of it. He did not care, however, to give expression just then to his innermost conviction, that, had not the Holy Catholic Church wandered afar from the teachings and example of its Founder, there had been no Church Universal.

So it befell that when Robert Annys set out on his mission the blessing of the Bishop went with him:—

"‘Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum.’

"Go, my son, and may the grace of God be with you and the spirit of the Holy Ghost!"

VIII

ONE day near unto a hundred years before the birth of Robert Annys, Sir Humphrey Sculton found himself in the middle of the river Trent, with his good horse struggling under him against the icy flood that was rushing down upon them, and carrying them always farther and farther from the ford. Sir Humphrey's distress was not relieved by the sight of the neglected bridge which should have borne him safely from shore to shore, but to whose crumbling stones he had not dared trust himself. While in this dire predicament, it is related by himself, he swore a great round oath that by Our Lady in Heaven if ever he should see again his castle and his good wife Eleanor smiling down upon him from the terrace, he would not only repair the bridge which the lazy monks had allowed to rot, but he would erect upon it a fine chapel to the Virgin, that all passers-by and wayfarers might appreciate her protection and seek after it. So, straightway the force of the flood having been miraculously stopped, and the horse

having found its way without further difficulty to the ford, and borne its master in safety to the opposite shore, the knight was as good as his word; and across the river he caused to be built a fine bridge of stone of nine arches, while on its east end arose the beautiful chapel of the Holy Virgin.

But, notwithstanding this eminent example of piety and service to mankind, the end of the fourteenth century again saw the bridge fallen into sad disrepair, those having received the *pontagium*, or right of bridge toll, having been well content to collect it, together with the offerings to the Holy Virgin, without stirring hand or foot to put the pennies to use. There were now places where the deep ruts made by the heavy carriages and carts had worn through almost to the very last inch of stone; indeed, here and there one might peer between the loosened cobbles and see the gray water flowing beneath.

Many were the petitions sent to the King, complaining that "this one, Adam Fenere, warden of the Chapel of the Holy Virgin, received and took away all manner of offerings and alms, without doing anything for the repair of the bridge or the said chapel as he was bound to do."

The parson of the neighboring church protested that it seemed hurtful to God and to Holy

Church that offerings should be appropriated by any one except the parson within whose parish the chapel is found. Wherefore he prayed "for God and Holy Church and for the souls of our lord the King's father and his ancestors, that he may have the keeping of the said chapel annexed to his church, together with the charge of the bridge." And he further promised "that he will take heed with all care to maintain them well, for the profit and honor of Holy Church, to please God and all the people passing that way."

To this strange medley of the human and the divine the King made his usual cautious reply, "Ly roi s'avisera," for this Adam was not without powerful friends at court; and, before the matter was satisfactorily adjusted, there came along this bridge one day a short, rotund traveller who, although in pilgrim's garb, yet rode a most excellent mount. This fellow drew in his rein and looked in frank amazement at certain clear signs of repair which were going on about him.

"What then! by Our Lady, hath the old skin-flint yonder of his own free will taken to yield some of the silver from his maw, or hath he been forced to?"

"Nay," replied one of the laborers, pausing for an instant in the placing of a heavy stone, "Nay,

trust Adam Fenere not to give up aught of what is once between his fingers; nay, 'tis him yonder that did set us all working, 'tis him yonder."

The pilgrim looked in the direction indicated, and was surprised to see a poor priest, of delicate build and saintly aspect, of the kind that attracts women to the bosom of the Church (or, as this fellow Stott was accustomed to put it, to the bosom of the Churchman), who yet was directing the work of repair with great vigor, even carrying and placing stones that seemed all too heavy for his strength.

"H'm, h'm," murmured the pilgrim to himself. "Seems better fitted to be a boudoir saint than a builder of bridges."

"Good Morrow," he cried to the poor priest, who now looked up wearily from his task, pressing a lean hand to his brow, "good Morrow! How comes it, Sir Russet-priest, that I find you doing this work? Surely those hands have been accustomed rather to the turning of the pages of a breviary than to the placing of stones."

The young poor priest flushed deeply, and there shot from his eyes that flash which in certain men is more compelling than the flash of steel; yet he answered quietly, "I do the work of my Master, wheresoever it leads me."

"And do you hold the building of bridges in greater repute than the saying of Aves, or is it mayhap that you wish to become a famous *pontiff*?" the fellow chuckled.

The play upon words evoked no smile from the earnest young poor priest, whose retort, however, waited not an instant. "Nay, but I find the land overflowing with those who will say 'Hail Marys' from Matin to Vespers, but I do not find over many ready to cut stones and repair the highways."

"Why not get down and help us?" asked one burly fellow of the traveller. "Wot you that the Bishop hath granted sixty days' indulgence to all who do the pious work of repairing roads or bridges?"

The fat pilgrim shook with laughter. "Water will freeze in May," he answered, "before you see Hugo Stott laboring in the highroad. And as for remittances of penances," he pointed significantly to the vernicle sewed conspicuously in his cap to show that he had but lately returned from a pilgrimage to Rome, "you see," he said, "I have seen somewhat of the world at the same time, and I have taken it leisurely and without toil, and, moreover, the Roman ladies are beautiful and complaisant." Then, catching sight of

the scorn in the eyes of the poor priest, he hastened to add, "Besides, I am bent upon more important business, for what would the people do were I to fail them?"

"Fail them in what?" indignantly asked Robert Annys—for the bridge repairer was he. "To my mind you fail them indeed if you scorn to help them in keeping in repair the one means they have of communicating with one another, of hearing of one another and keeping up the bonds of fellowship."

"Well," replied the other, good-humoredly, "I do my share in keeping the roads in repair—thou in one way, I in another."

"How now," exclaimed Annys, fiercely; "I do not jest."

"Nor I. Nothing is simpler. Take a man who hath been ordered to make a pilgrimage to Rome, or even let us say Canterbury, I pardon him his pilgrimage at the expense of a few shillings, and by my help he hath at once saved his immortal soul and the road which he would have worn by his feet."

"And you thereby have lined your pouch with the shillings," said Annys, more amiably, for, much as he detested these pardoners who were living off the ignorance and superstition of the people, he

could not resist a smile at the fellow's quaint logic.

"Ay! 'Tis an equal division. I take the pence and they get the peace. I do the wandering and endure the hardships of travel" (here he could not help a grimace as he saw the other's keen eyes fixed pointedly on the finely groomed horse with the luxurious trappings, a mount that scarce spoke very eloquently of hardships). "See," he continued, pointing to the various signs and amulets which hung in great profusion about his neck, "see, here are the ampullæ from Canterbury, and this scallop shell I got all the way from the shrine of St. James in Galicia; and you see I must hunt up relics and medals from all parts of the world, while they bide peaceably at home and derive all the benefits from them."

There was something in the russet priest, notwithstanding his clear displeasure, that attracted the pardon seller. "See here, Sir Russet-priest," he began, approaching nearer and lowering his voice, "be thou not so sour-faced, young man. Thou hast thy way of bringing blessings to the people, and I have mine. And thou must grant that we pardoners have our uses. You long-visaged chaps may do more to uplift the people as ye call it, but drat me if ye leave them so merry as I."

"Ay! God wot, they have little enough to make them merry," groaned Annys.

"I satisfy the cravings of their souls by the transfer of a bit of sow's ear, or a few drops of calf's blood—so be it—or a bit of riband or a bead or two, and I go my way singing. And I come not with long face to prate of the devil and hell-fire, but of jollity and pleasaunce, and if perchance they will none of my relics, I am at no loss, either, for I have here in my bag what all good wives love," and he put one pudgy hand into the huge bag which hung on his saddle, and drew forth a couple of shining knives and some bright necklaces of cheap beads and a gauntlet or two.

"If so it chance that I meet with a customer that is not likely to be caught on the side of his soul, you see I am ready at a turn of the hand to land him with the needs of his body."

There came into the poor priest's mind what was commonly rumored of these peddling pardners, how no maid was safe with them. Even then he noted the man's lascivious mouth, which parted to show ugly, yellow fangs, and the bloated body which spoke of every excess, the small roving eyes and the heavy knot of red eyebrows that met over them, the coarse, knobby nose with red and purple veins running through it and a great

wart on one side,—a face for maids to shrink from.

And this man shrived sinful souls!

“How long, how long, O Lord!” he cried, as he watched the man ride away.

But before he was quite out of sight, the fellow turned and called, “I shall see thee at the Stourbridge Fair, doubtless,” and Annys nodded an impatient yes, and resumed his labors, although already he staggered from fatigue.

But to stagger from a fatigue that was purely physical was a joy to Robert Annys. Often worn and unstrung from the sense of the awful responsibility that was upon him, he would plunge recklessly into some physical labor that was severe enough to absorb his every energy. Physical labor became his anodyne to the growing unrest and despair that was in his heart. In the task which he had taken up he suffered even as the Bishop had foretold. He never questioned the righteousness of his decision, he never faltered in his work, no matter how it taxed his slight store of strength, so long as he was upheld by the knowledge that it helped the Cause to which he had given his life. It was only when discouraged by the ignorance and folly and cruelty of those whom he hoped to serve that he questioned his own

power to accomplish good. During the nine months that had followed since he had stepped into Ball's place, again and again had he been utterly cast down by the terrible dread that the actual Uprising would take place before the peasants were ready for it. And two dire results were ever in his mind: the one, that whatever would be gained would be lost again through lack of wise leadership and self-restraint; the other (and this became an almost daily horror to him as he watched the humor of the rustics daily growing blacker and blacker), that the few wise and true men who were working for an Ideal would be swept aside when the Uprising came, by the fierce and unruly majority, by men who had nursed their wrongs until they were no longer of the right mind, men who would wreak a fearful vengeance when their time should come.

However, there had not been much time wasted in wondering or prophesying, for there had been much to do. The people welcomed him eagerly everywhere; and before he had done speaking at one village, he had learned of another where they awaited him anxiously. And so he had tramped manfully along the highway, his valiant spirit making him press on often when the other travellers whom he encountered gave

way before floods and snows. At times, he too was forced to yield when the storms rendered the roads utterly impassable, and he had known many a slow-footed day pass over his head while he waited impatiently at some wayside tavern, and looked out with anxious eyes at the snow falling and imprisoning him far from those that looked for him and counted on him. At such moments of dreary inaction it was that his fears for the future weighed heaviest.

Wherever he came, he brought news of the Uprising, and spoke of the great rendezvous at Blackheath for which all must get ready to stand before the King and tell him of their sore straits. There was something pitiful in the unquestioning faith which they all held that, their situation once known to their King, he could not but set them free. That a King could be unkindly did not enter their simple, trusting hearts. To the men in all the realm, to those of Kent as well as to those of Essex, to those of Suffolk as well as to those of Norfolk, the great plain at Blackheath was spoken of as the great rallying-place. To the men of those counties where they fared somewhat better than the others, he spoke of the dire needs of their fellow-brethren in some distant county, and how they must all hold together and

take up the cause of those that were less fortunate than they. To those that were the most miserable of all, he spoke of their brethren of other parts of the land, who were going to help and uphold them. And so from village to village and county to county he went, always knitting closer the bonds of fellowship. For a while the Hierarchy had looked on and bided its time. Yet sooner or later it was obliged to strike a blow at this defiant poor priest who preached a doctrine fatal to the interest of the Holy Roman Church, and, moreover, who heartened the peasants in their absurd mutterings against their rightful overlords. Already the Barons were growing restive that the Church should move so slowly. If the powerful Hierarchy could not crush a dangerous sedition-stirring russet priest like this, then of small use was their costly ally.

So with all due pomp and ceremony at St. Peter's in Rome, the Anathema against Robert Annys, poor priest, had been duly launched by twelve Cardinals surrounding the Pope upon his throne. The solemn bells tolled as at a death, and all the Cardinals cast their lighted candles upon the ground as they cried "Fiat" to the mandate of their chief. Then the acolytes trampled upon

the candles and extinguished their lights, even as the soul is extinguished that dwells in hell.

Annys had been filled with indignant scorn. "They would excommunicate Christ Himself, did He come upon the earth to-day!" he said bitterly. There was something horrible to him in the fact that the head of the present Church of Christ should cast a soul into perdition for going among the people and following the clear example and mandates of Him whom the Church still had the effrontery to call its Founder! What heresy had he been guilty of? He had but obeyed St. Paul, who put love above all else.

Love broke down many barriers, and solved many problems. What question, for instance, compared in importance in Mediæval days with the great controversy over the Treasury of the Church? Did or did not the Founder of Christianity mean what He said when He commanded that none should take heed of the morrow?

Upon this hung the establishments of sects, monasteries, entire orders, and also squabbles without end between the Commons and Bishops, between Popes and Emperors. Yet Robert Annys felt that the problem lay far deeper than either Franciscan or Benedictine or Papal Col-

lector had put it; if the clergy really loved their brethren, their moneys naturally would slip through their fingers, none could remain either for pomp or display, or for Papal claims. If nobles really loved the poor workers in the fields, and wept over their poverty, their wealth could not roll up for the endowment of chantries, the embroidering of altar cloths, or the embellishment of the tombs of saints. The whole vexed question would soon solve itself. Yet Marsiglio, the Italian seer, and Robert Annys, the English poor priest who was inspired by his teachings, both had been banished from the Church!

Besides, the Hierarchy could not forgive the attempt to teach the common folk to read the Bible for themselves. For this were Wyclif and all his followers anathema. A most pious Churchman thus made to Rome his moan:—

“He translates the Scriptures from Latin into English, not the angelic tongue, whence it becomes by his means common and more open to laymen and the women who know how to read, than it is to tolerably learned and very intelligent clergymen, and the gospel pearl is scattered and trampled upon by swine.”

Had this warm defender of the Church Hierarchical witnessed the reverence and tenderness with which the heavy folios were handled by

A TALE OF THE GREAT UPRISING 101

those same lay men and women, had he witnessed something of the patient toil whereby they gained the knowledge of its contents, he scarce would have found it in his heart to pen that contemptuous metaphor!

IX

THE low-roofed tavern at Bury Saint Edmunds was a favorite place for the men to gather together at the close of their day's work. It was a place of good cheer, not alone because there was ale in plenty—none of your cheap, thin, penny ale either, such as is brewed for the day-laborer's dole, but good strong ale of the best and brownest brew—nor alone from the sense of comradeship that reigned, but also because there was warmth and comfort within, while without it was dark with usually a high northeast wind racing about one's ears, if one but ventured forth. And, moreover, there was light here, while at home one would have to go straightway to bed; for artificial light, even of the home-made candles of rushes dipped in grease, was entirely too expensive a luxury to be wasted. Here at the tavern, although the flaring rushlights, stuck high up over the oak wainscoting, gave a rather uncertain light; yet it was easy to distinguish one's neighbors, and it was as good

as one could expect outside of the church. The church was the one place where hundreds of candles at a time, of purest wax, blazed with a superb indifference to cost. There was also some illumination from the glowing logs which burned in the centre of the floor, sending a slender pillar of smoke up to the hole in the roof which served as a vent. When the door of the tavern was opened, the wind drove the smoke about the room into every crack and cranny, but none coughed or complained of the smarting of the eyes, for this was a discomfort to which they were well accustomed.

One night there were seated about the long oaken table that ran the length of the room, a goodly number of men. Those at one end of the table kept their voices low and discussed and planned matters of grave import, while from some roisterers at the other end of the table came frequent bold oaths and hoarse cries of "Pass the ale" and "Who holds the bowl?"

Among the serious ones was a great, powerfully built fellow whom they called Ralph Rugge, and on whom they looked as the leader of the men of the Bury. And there were Tim the needle-maker, Thomas Pye the wagon-maker, Jack the smith, and Robert Annys just arrived.

There were one or two others, noticeable among them all a youthful giant called Richard Meryl, towards whose frank, handsome face the poor priest's eyes constantly wandered.

After Annys had taken the edge off his hunger, doing full justice to the food that was placed before him on a neatly scraped trencher of hard oak, Rugge turned to him and said, "Hast any news from John Ball?"

"I bear with me a letter from him," was the reply.

"What, from gaol?"

"Yea, from Maidstone gaol hath he sent it by trusty messengers."

A look of interest ran from man to man, and they edged their stools closer about him. Annys read the letter to them with many misgivings, for he felt that it but fed their angry passions, and that it was like a spark to a pile of dried fagots.

"Good people," the letter began, "things will never go well in England so long as goods be not in common, and so long as there be villeins and gentlemen. By what right are they whom we call lords greater folk than we? On what grounds have they deserved it? Why do they hold us in serfage? If we all came of the same father and mother, of Adam and Eve, how can they say or prove that they are better than we, if it be not that they make us gain for them by our toil what they spend in their pride? They are clothed in velvet and warm in their furs and their ermines, while we are covered with rags. They have wine and spices and fair bread; and we have oat-cakes

and straw and water to drink. They have leisure and fine houses ; we have pain and labor, the rain and the wind in the fields."

"That's God's truth, God's truth!" came from all sides, enthusiastically.

"May the fires of hell burn me if they'll not be saying next that they did come from Adam and Eve, but that we came from some baser stock," exclaimed young Meryl with a bitter laugh.

"I tell you," added another, "until we show our lords that we are worth to them as much as their cattle, we shall not receive the same care and fodder."

"Dost hanker after hay?" called out a wit.

"Well," answered the other, abashed at the laugh that followed, "they are precious anxious to keep their cattle sleek and fat, and they might cast a thought on their men to keep their paunches fairly well lined."

"Ay! the cattle must have the fat of the land, but the men may go hungry," growled Thomas Pye.

"*May* go hungry, forsooth ! I have not known a day for many a month that I have had my fill," said Tim the needle-maker, wistfully.

"We'll show them, we'll show them," cried an evil-looking fellow with a leer of hatred. "Their cattle cannot burn their palaces over their heads."

"There'll be no liberty in this land until every palace lies smoking on the ground," agreed another.

"They won't be so glad of their fine wines when they see us pouring them down our throats," exclaimed one.

"Nor of their jewelled goblets when they see them at our lips," continued another in the same strain.

Annys groaned, for he had dreaded just such an outburst. He was about to command that this wild talk cease instantly when Rugge, whose patience had also given way, leaned close to the last speaker, and rammed a formidable-looking fist into his face, crying, "Look, Adam Clymme, the man who speaks like that is a traitor to the Cause, and a worse traitor than any abbot or clerk."

The man jerked back his head. "What d'ye mean?" he asked sullenly.

"Just what I said. Our cause is just, we want to be free men, we want to live as decent men should; but that does not mean that we covet the rich man's jewels and wines. We will be looked upon as thieves and murderers, not honest men asking for our rights."

The fellow flushed and muttered angrily, but

several raised their voices and cried, "He's right, Ralph Rugge's right!" Annys looked gratefully at Rugge, who continued warmly: "They'll be glad enough to call us thieves. We'll take their gold and jewels and fine linens and burn them in great bonfires all throughout the land to show we don't approve of such gewgaws. No one must say we are rising because we are greedy for these things for ourselves. I warn ye, wherever I am in command, I shall strike dead the first man that steals, if it be only so much as a bit of silver."

"Good! Good!" spoke up young Meryl with ringing voice. "For no cause was ever won by thieves and robbers; we be honest men who seek what is ours by right." His face shone with enthusiasm as he spoke.

"Ay! but it is by the sweat of our brows and the stoop of our backs that the rich have these things," protested Jack the smith.

But Annys now spoke.

"My friends," he said, "ye all know of that great and noble poet Will Langland whose hero is Piers Ploughman."

"Ay, marry! we all know Will Langland."

"Let me tell you what he saith of envy, and we shall see that the counsel of Ralph Rugge is wise and just:—

“Envy with her herte asketh after schrift,
As pale as a pellet. In a palesye he seemede,
As a leek that had longe lain in the sonne,
So looked he with lene cheekes.
Venom or vinegar, I trow
Is in my belly filling me with wind.
I annoy my neighbor, I blame him behind his back,
I injure and revile him, I stir up strife between him and
his.
I envy him his new clothes, I laugh when he loses, weep when
he smiles,
So live I loveless, and my brest boils so bitter is my gall.’

“Then, when Repentance bids him be sorry,—
“‘I am sori,’ quod Envy, ‘I never am other
than sori.’

“Think of that terrible picture, when ye are tempted to envy the fortune of others, *‘I am never other than sori.’* Do not let envy take up its dwelling-place in your hearts. Read Holy Writ, rather, and consider that such as have riches and joy on this earth have received their reward, but that ours is for all eternity.”

When he had done speaking the young man on whom the poor priest’s eyes had been fixed in a kind of special appeal leaned across the table, and holding out a strong sinewy hand, said:—

“I am Richard Meryl, and I fear I have been among the envious ones; but by the Mother of

Christ thou dost speak well, and I shall do my best to hearken unto thee.

"And yet," he added, with an engaging smile, as Annys wrung his hand heartily, "and yet it is hard to be other than sorry while Covetousness and Greed rule the land and crush us poor folk like corn beneath the stone."

"Ay!" returned Annys, "I would have ye none other than sorry for that—but sorry to some purpose. What good will it do to rise up and rule the land for a day? Shall we not rather by patience and fortitude hold what we gain for unborn generations, so that our children's children need not fight the great fight over again, but may start where we leave off?"

"That my children's children have full bellies easeth not the wind in mine," grumbled Jack the smith.

But Meryl spoke up hotly:—

"He who works only for to-day will starve to-morrow."

And Annys felt that he had won a helpful friend.

"When dost think the whole country will be ready?" asked Rugge of Annys.

"Plenty yet to do, plenty to do," was the reply. "There are counties where they await but the

word, but there are others where they are none too ready to loose hand from the plough."

"Ay, those are the counties where the plough yet yields a living somewhat better than a dog's."

"Yea, there are places in the land where the Black Death but took away enough mouths to fill those that remain. There the men have a cold heart and an unready ear, and it is hard enough to beat into them a sense of fellowship for those who are suffering and a-hungering afar off. It is slow work getting from east to west and from south to north, yet the good work prospers surely. Steadily the people are coming to right knowledge. More and more Holy Writ is being placed into their hands, and it taketh but small wit to see there is something awry with a world which matcheth so ill with its Word."

"Ay!" cried one lustily, "did the world go by the Book, there would be no woe and unruth."

"Yes," spoke up Richard Meryl, "but the world goes not by the law of Holy Writ, but by the law of Westminster, and therein lieth all the unrest. Did they not seek to put man's law above God's law, there would be no rebellion."

Annys nodded approvingly. There was something rarely winning in this young man.

"Hast heard of the new law which the Com-

mons have passed?" asked Thomas Pye the wagon-maker of young Meryl.

"Let them pass their laws at Westminster," exclaimed one man, passionately, "and let's see how well they can cultivate their lands with parchment rolls."

"What have they done now?" asked Meryl.

"They have declared that 'carters, ploughmen, plough drivers, shepherds, swineherds, deyes, and other servants should be content with such liveries and wages as they received in the twentieth year of King Edward's reign.'

"Declared that we be content," mocked Tim the needle-maker. "Have they so, indeed!" Then rising, he addressed the others in a loud voice. "Fellows, the law hath declared that we be content. Why then so we must be — by Westminister law which can call the sky green if it take a notion — it must be so."

"Content then," broke in Ralph Rugge, with a laugh, "is but a matter of a drop of ink on the end of a quill."

"Next they will fill our empty stomachs with parchment sheets," uttered one fellow, in strong disgust, whereat a great laugh went up because the speaker, Richard Bole, was known for a great glutton.

"But that is not all," said the first speaker. "They will not that one should depart from one part of the country to another to serve, or reside elsewhere, or under pretence of going to a pilgrimage, without a letter patent, specifying cause of his departure and time of his return, granted at discretion of the justice of the peace."

"Yea," continued Ralph Rugge, taking the words out of the other's mouth, "and if such a runaway be caught, he will be imprisoned for fifteen days and branded on the forehead with the letter F; and any one found harboring him would be liable to a fine of ten pounds."

"Curse their insolence!" muttered one whose face was flushed with liquor and whose hands trembled with something other than indignation. "Curse their insolence! Next they will seek to plant us in the soil with a spade chained to our arms!"

"Yea, it is hard," spoke up Annys, with a sigh; "it is a bondage worse than that of the Hebrews in Egypt; yet remain steadfast and patient, and all must come right in the end."

At the other end of the table the men grew more and more under the influence of the flowing ale.

A strong voice now rang out from the lower end of the table:—

“‘To seek silver to the king I my seed sold.’”

“‘Wherfore my land lieth fallow and learneth to sleep,’

joined in another voice.

“‘Since they fetched my fair cattle in the fold :
When I think of my old wealth, well-nigh I weep.
Thus breedeth many beggars bold.’”

By the time the last line was reached the whole room took it up, and the walls shook with the song:—

“‘And there wakeneth in the world dismay and woe
For as good is death anon as so far to toil.’”

At the close of the song, Rugge looked about him, and singled out from a dark corner, where he had been quietly looking on, a shy lad in the garb of a minstrel, who, hugging his rebec under his arm, shambled awkwardly up to his leader.

“Hither, my brave boy,” cried Rugge, presenting him to Annys; “this is Jack Nicol, a better friend to the Cause than those who swing a broad axe or train an arrow against those who live only by labor of tongue. This youth never opens his lips but he risks a broken pate, and indeed he is very like to find himself clapped into gaol for his bold songs which do stir the people up to ask for their freedom.”

"Good!" cried Annys, clapping the boy upon his back; "we shall know each other better before long, for I shall have need of thee."

"I am ready," replied the boy, yet rubbing his head somewhat ruefully on the spot where the sheriff's stick had been all too familiar with it.

"Yea, these minstrels do wot well how to reach the heart of the people," said Rugge, "and a good stirring rime can do more in a moment than much preaching can do in many months."

"A rime, a rime, give us one now," they called to the minstrel.

"Yea, a rime, a rime, a rime, a geste!" ran through the room.

The boy hung back for an instant, and then, putting his rebec tenderly to his chin, launched forth upon the song that of all others stirred the blood the quickest, the song so dear to the people that scarce any gathering would disperse until the rafters rang with its well-conned words:—

"'Lithe and lysten, gentylmen,
That be of freebore blode;
I shall you tell of a good yeman,
His name was Robyn Hode.'"

The roisterers looked up and left their hands from the tankards, the nodding heads first stiffened and then kept time to the rhythm, the sodden

faces brightened, while the young minstrel, in a peculiarly sweet voice, sang on of Robyn's men asking for orders before they should set out through the green woods:—

“‘ Where we shall take, where we shall leve,
 * * * * *
 Where we shall robbe, where we shall reve ? ’ ”

Whereupon the good chief instructs his loyal followers, and closes with the admonition which went a great ways to account for his peculiar popularity with the people:—

“‘ But loke ye do no housbonde harme
 That tylleth with his plough.
 * * * * *
 No more ye shall no good yeman
 That walketh by grene wode shawe.
 * * * * *
 These bysshoppes, and these archebysshoppes
 Ye shall them bete and bynde.’ ”

Each verse met with its full measure of praise, and certainly none was more heartily applauded than the last, which commended to mercy the soul of the brave Robyn:—

“‘ Cryst have mercy on his soule,
 That dyed on the rode
 For he was a good outlawe
 And dyde pore men moch god.’ ”

"Help, help, save me, hide me for the love of Christ!" All looked up startled as this cry came from outside, and at the same time the door was flung open and there was blown into the room, with the gusty wind, a man who, after casting a swift, appealing glance at the faces about the table, sank exhausted to the floor. Even without the sudden cry for help, the wild appearance of the fellow would have been sufficient to startle them. He was dressed as a pilgrim, and the long gown was rent here and there, as if torn in some struggle. The pilgrim's staff, although still tightly grasped by one hand, was broken off short, the vernicle had been wrenched from his cap by violent hands, and now hung by a thread, swaying and bobbing with every move of his head. The fellow's cheeks were hollow, his sunken temples throbbed tumultuously, his lips were dry and pallid, his eyes were wild, his hair and beard matted and unkempt.

Here was before them one of the very pretended pilgrims of whom they had spoken. Doubtless the sheriffs had seen through his disguise, and were even then hot upon his heels.

The fellow had sunk at the feet of Tim the needle-maker. He opened his eyes feebly, and murmured one more "Help me!"

"Ten pounds fine for the harboring of such," muttered Tim, as he took to his heels and closed the door behind him.

Others became alarmed.

"Ten pounds! 'tis more than I possess in the whole world!"

"Ten pounds! Mother Mary!"

Annys rose indignantly. "Cowards!" he hissed. "Is this your boasted fellowship? Is this the way ye succor your brother?"

But, before he had done, Richard Meryl had quickly risen, lifted the fallen man, and guided him through the door. He knew a hiding-place where all such refugees were welcomed for the sake of one who had died in the same desperate attempt to win a decent living.

X

THE following morning Annys sought out Richard Meryl to learn more of the refugee. As he was conducted to the hiding-place, young Meryl related something of the women who were risking so much for a stranger.

"I am bringing you to old Dame Westel and her granddaughter Matilda," he said. "When Matilda was but a babe in arms, her father, tempted by the bait of large wages in Suffolk, was returned by the sheriffs, branded. But his wife being big with child, and he watching her cheeks grow hollow day by day, he grew desperate and made a second attempt. For this he was thrown into gaol and suffered to lie there and rot. He died of gangrene of both feet while his wife slowly starved to death, and her babe within her."

"Horrible, horrible!" exclaimed Annys; "there is more justice done to kine than to man made in the image of God. O my God! how long can this be endured?"

"Ay! thy cry of patience burns on thy tongue, doth it not?"

"Ay, so. But tell me some more."

"You will see for yourself. The poor old woman lives only for two things — to hide others who should pass through, and to pore over a torn and dog-eared copy of the Bible which a poor priest did leave with her."

Annys was much interested. "Ah, she will get much comfort and peace from the Holy Book."

The young man laughed. "As to that, I wot not; rather she does suck the vengeance and wrath from its pages e'en as a babe sucks its mother's milk."

"Say you so? 'Tis ill, indeed. I shall change all that, and bring speedy comfort to her."

"Well, thou hast a bold heart, then. I wish thee joy of thy task."

"Lives she all by herself?"

Richard colored. "Nay, her granddaughter, Matilda, is an angel if ever one walked this earth. She does devote herself to the old woman, and yet never is word of complaint suffered to pass her lips."

"And that is all?"

"Oh," he replied, with a shrug of his shoulders, "no one counts the other granddaughter, a sullen,

proud beauty, the illegitimate daughter of the old Baron de Leaufort, uncle of the present one, and long since gone to Hell if ever sinner went there."

"Poor woman! she seems to have had trouble enough."

"Trouble! Ay! And yet, alas, the tale is not a rare one. It is hard to have faith in the goodness of God when one sounds all the misery on earth."

"The works of God are hidden among men," replied Annys, gravely, as they came to one of the humblest of the wattled huts that made up the village, and paused before it.

"They shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.' The poor shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Ha! ha!"

The voice came from within.

Outside on a low stool, engaged in her spinning, sat a lovely young girl, in whose sweet, open countenance, touched with a gentle gravity beyond her years, the poor priest recognized Matilda Westel.

He inquired after the refugee and was told that he was resting, and that at daybreak he was to be taken to the highway and instructed how to make the next town before nightfall. His garb had

been neatly repaired, and a new staff found for him. Annys offered to give him a rosary.

"Would thy grandmother care to see me?" he asked.

A quick look passed from the girl to Richard, who stood by her side.

"Tell him," she begged the young man, who seemed to hesitate how to begin.

"In what way can I serve thee?" Annys asked.

"Matilda's grandmother," began Richard, "can read only very little. She has picked up enough to read only a few texts which that poor priest of whom I spake to you taught her by heart. It has ever been her desire to read further in the Book."

"And if it be not too much trouble," continued the girl, "I had hoped perhaps that I might be taught also to read, that my eyes might save grandmother's old and tired ones."

"Yea, that she might be her eyes, as she has been for years her head and feet and hands," exclaimed Richard, heartily, and Annys caught the look of love that illumined his face as his eyes rested on her. It heartened the poor priest to be in the presence of an affection which was so far removed from the morbid hysterical emotion

of the monks and saints, whose confessions had always disgusted rather than edified him.

"Shall we go in?" ventured Annys, and, receiving the young girl's permission, he entered the low door and discovered a wrinkled old dame seated on a low stool poring over a copy of Wyclif's Vulgate, crooning over to herself certain lines which she had evidently learned by heart.

"They shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. The poor of this earth shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Is it not so, Sir Poor Priest?"

On his entrance, she had risen, and almost shrieked this in her thin, cracked treble.

"Yea, surely, surely," answered the poor priest soothingly, "the good Book hath it so."

She looked up into his face eagerly, and searched it with her dim eyes.

"Robert Annys, they tell me that you do learn poor folk to read — see, I wot well what is here, 'Give none occasion to a man to curse thee, for if he curse thee, in the bitterness of his soul, he that made him will hear his supplication.'

"And here," she continued, seating herself and bending low over the book as she rapidly turned the pages with her trembling fingers, "here Solomon saith, 'that no king had other beginning, but all men have one entrance into life and

a like departure.' Oh, that I wot right well, but there is more, there is more, that I would read for myself; there is a part which ever I seek which tells that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Show me that, and if canst help me read the wonderful Book, then shall a poor woman's blessing follow thee all the days of thy life."

Annys regarded her pityingly. "Right gladly will I help thee. And I shall tell thee of other parts of Holy Writ that speak of Love and Forgiveness, and teach thee that part which saith, 'Love your enemies and forgive those that trespass against you.'"

But the old woman flung the book straightway at his head in a passion, crying, "I will none of thy book; and it says that, I want none of it. Not for that would I toil and wear out mine eyes reading it. Nay, nay, thou art wrong. Thou dost seek to pull the wool over mine eyes. For doth not the good Book say:—

"'Woe unto you that are rich. Woe unto you, ye that are full now, for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you, ye that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep'?"

And, quite exhausted by her tirade, she sank

back again on her stool. Annys bent over her, greatly shocked, and took one of her hands in his and stroked it tenderly.

" Yet, my good woman," he said, in low, gentle tones, " yet is there not more comfort in love and forgiveness, than in revengeful wrath and hate? "

The old woman snatched away her hand and swayed to and fro, beating the floor with one foot and moaning softly.

" Oh, these priests, these priests," at last she broke out fiercely, " they wot not a tenth part of our woes, or they could not find it in their hearts to prate ever of love and forgiveness."

" I but seek to bring peace to thy heart," remonstrated Annys, " for peace can never enter save through love. Besides, how canst thou say the Lord's prayer? Doth it not say: ' Forgive us our sins, as we forgive them that have misdone against us'? "

" Nay! " returned the old woman, stubbornly, " I do pray to that God who said, ' An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' "

He was about to touch on his favorite theme, the new spirit of Charity and Love that the Christ had brought into the sterner religion of the Old Testament, but now she burst forth even

more vehemently, rising and tossing her arms high over her head.

“What is thy boasted religion that would take from an old woman her sole comfort?

“‘Love mine enemies,’ indeed! Does good God expect me to love that Baron de Leaufort—now suffering the torments of hell-fire, if ever sinner doth—who made merry within his castle, while my daughter, my beautiful, merry Rose, lay forgotten on the moat, brought there through him? And am I to love those lawmakers at Westminster who say that no man may move hand or foot to seek an honest living, but must stay rooted in the earth where he happened to grow, like a rotting trunk? Oh, yes, one may wander from Lincoln to London if it be but for merrymaking and foolishness; but no man may travel to the next county if it be to place bread between the teeth of his children. Bah! a fig care I for thy kind of religion! Begone, begone, with thy smooth tongue and thy sleek face, begone!”

But Annys did not go. Sighing heavily, he said: “My poor woman, take such comfort as is left to thee. I shall come again to-morrow and I shall teach thee such texts as thou wilt have. Indeed, I shall teach also thy granddaughter that

she may aid thee. Be comforted, I pray thee," and, with a warm pressure of the hand, he was gone.

His heart was heavy that night. Was this, then, to be the end of placing the Bible in the hands of the people? Was their God to be a God of Vengeance and Wrath instead of Charity and Love? Instead of coming nearer Christ Jesus, were they to be further from Him than ever?

XI

DURING the next few months, Annys made his way to the Bury whenever he could. No sacrifice was too great if it could give him a few hours with his new-found friends, Richard and Matilda. To him there was quite a new sense of belonging to some one place, of having a home where his friends awaited him. He had led a lonely life. At Oxford he had been a close student and had never joined in the riotous gatherings and bouts of the students; his master he had adored, but no man had he called friend. Later, during his wandering life as poor priest, many a heartfelt blessing had been poured upon him and many a sombre face brightened at the sight of him, but he had had no real comrade.

Richard Meryl had been as strongly drawn to Annys as the poor priest to him, and, under his influence, gradually the Uprising appealed to Meryl as far more than a longing for a full stomach. Before Annys had come, he had been one of the unruly ones, anxious to storm castles and

manors if need be to better their horrible condition. But now he worked ardently with the poor priest to instil into the people a noble patience, an idealism that would enable them to hold forever whatever success they would gain.

The men did not take Meryl's change of heart very kindly. He, one of the most eager, now to be holding them back!

"Every yonker hath become a seer," sneered one of the older men, as Meryl was admonishing them in the poor priest's absence.

The blood rose swiftly to the young man's cheeks.

"One is never too young to learn. It seems that one may be too old," he said angrily.

"Bah! a fig for thy dreaming poor priest. Give us a torch, say I, and march upon all the castles and abbeys in the land — the sooner the better. The more we delay the more the Barons will laugh and call us but idle boasters."

"Ay," retorted Meryl, "go thou and a handful of others. For a while ye will think yourselves the masters of the earth. Yet it will be as a drop in the bucket compared to what shall be gained if ye bide in patience till the men of every county be ready to rise. Then all the nobles of the land cannot withstand us."

"There is something in his counsellings, after all," murmured the old man. "Yet it is bitter biding the time, and patience and an eager belly go ill together."

Meanwhile Robert Annys led a busy life, making frequent trips to the neighboring towns and hamlets, and preaching before great gatherings. The excommunication bore little fruit. Even Annys was astonished to find how few men cared. For there were many reasons why men still continued to hold fellowship with him. First, they needed him, they found that he brought them what they craved. Also, at no time had the Papacy been held in such scant reverence. How could the spectacle of two rival, quarrelling Popes struggling and wrangling over the chair of Peter as two dogs snarling over a bone, fail to hold up the sacred office to ridicule? Moreover, little by little the figure of the Pope, albeit that he wore upon his head a mitre whose three jewelled crowns cost over five hundred thousand pieces of gold, was waning in majesty and power before that simple figure of a man upon whose forehead rested only a crown of thorns. At a different period, earlier or later, Annys would have found himself in terrible isolation; men would have shrunk from the slightest contact

with him, and he would have suffered keenly, even for the ordinary necessities of life. But now so little heed was paid to his excommunication, that a second Papal Bull was launched forth, anathematizing even such as should listen to the heretical and incendiary preaching of this poor priest, Robert Annys.

And still the rustics continued to gather about him whenever he appeared, in the fields, or at the cross-roads, or at the very thresholds of the Church that banished him. Men sent for him to speak with them when they were disheartened; they sent for him when they wished for tidings of the Great Uprising; they sent for him to shrive their souls when they faced the awful journey through eternity, forgetting that it was denied him to perform the offices of Holy Church, remembering only the strong grip of his hand and the love-light in his eyes that somehow seemed to make the great journey less terrible. Dimly struggling through the hierarchical, conventional conception of the priestly office, was coming the recognition of the priest as just a human brother with the sorrows and temptations of all men, and just a little more spirituality and helpfulness than is given to all.

Once, when Annys returned from a long jour-

ney, he was more exhausted than usual. Matilda was frankly frightened. Indeed, Richard had of late questioned in his heart if her interest in the poor priest were not growing more intense than mere friendship would warrant. He had watched them together over their Bible with a terrible foreboding in his heart. He had noted, also, the swift illumination of her face whenever Annys returned to them. He was not really betrothed to Matilda, and yet since he had first known her as a little girl he had never thought of marrying another woman. Their friendship had been constant and devoted, but as yet no words of love had been spoken on either side.

"Thou dost look worn and weary," exclaimed Matilda, tenderly, as she laid out for Annys such simple refreshment as she could offer. "It is more than human strength can bear, such work as thine. Take a rest now with us," she added solicitously.

Annys looked into her kind eyes and smiled. He passed one thin hand wearily over his brow. Ah, if it were only the body that was weary. He raised some food mechanically to his lips.

Matilda wondered if he was conscious of the fact that he was eating. There was a hunted look in his eyes as he exclaimed suddenly: —

"God wot, what strange hocus-pocus planted me in Ball's shoes. The devil himself could not have made a stranger misfit."

"How canst say so?" exclaimed Meryl, indignantly. "Have I not heard it said that not even John Ball himself can sway men to his will as Robert Annys can? Do not men wait for thy coming from Norfolk to Sussex?"

"Ay! well enough can I sway them to my will when it does not go contrary to theirs," he murmured. And then he smiled to think that he should be trying to explain to these simple friends all the intricate workings of his heart. And yet there was something soothing in their ready sympathy, there was something calming in voicing his innermost dread, so that he continued more in soliloquy than conversation.

"Ah! it is not that I do not have great power over the men; rather is it that I have so much power, and fear to use it ill. 'Twould be easier far to fail than to succeed with a question ever eating into one's vitals. It is a curse for a leader of men to be possessed of imagination. It is to see the furthermost end to which our own words and deeds take us. No sage could endure to see the effect of his own teachings. Either his heart would break or his reason be unseated. What

would have been the agony of St. Francis could he have looked into the future and seen the powerful Franciscan monasteries actually condemned for their great properties. Could Christ have seen the Church of His disciples straying farther from His teachings than ever had the Church of the Jews, then well might He have cried,—

“‘Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani?’ ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’”

Matilda had sunk to the floor during this impassioned speech, and looked up into the poor priest’s noble, sensitive face with a rapt gaze in which Meryl read the confirmation of his suspicions. His own face grew sombre and gloomy as Annys continued.

“Ah, such agonies, my friends, have I endured, passing among men and trying to plant the seed of good-fellowship among them, and seeing but the weeds of envy and hatred spring up in their stead; trying to awaken in their hearts pity for the sufferings of their brethren, and stirring up only vengeance against the rich. What have I not suffered in trying to arouse self-sacrifice and self-control and a steadfastness to noble ideals, and finding only bitterness of spirit and rapaciousness and self-seeking!”

He pushed his low stool away from the table,

and paced about the room rapidly, sometimes his hands striking one another in fierce energy, and again at times stretched out appealingly to heaven, while his auditors sat in silence, full of their own thoughts. "Oh, how I have poured forth love and sympathy upon you, my brethren! How have I dreamed, awake and asleep, of the Great Uprising! How have I pictured the orderly, majestic march of hundreds of thousands of men, the wonderful gathering together of men from all parts of the realm, the coming before the King with their just grievances, ever orderly and self-respecting, and upheld by the consciousness of right-doing. And then how I have wept tears of joy to think that the King could not but give heed, and that he would make of them all free men, free, no longer serfs and villeins, but free as good God created them.

"And what do I see?" he cried wildly, as he cast himself down on a settle and bowed his face in his hands. "What do I see? I see England swept from north to south, from Lincoln to Kent, by the flames of infuriated incendiaries. I see castles sacked, abbeys ruined. I see the people, my people, God's people, drunk with power, blind with rage, going madly into the trap the nobles have set for them. My eyes are

blinded night and day by the glare of the conflagration, my ears are deafened by the shrieks of the victims, there is blood upon everything. There is blood upon this settle, there is blood upon this table, there is blood upon this goblet. Sometimes I fear that I shall go mad. I see decapitated heads on the gates of the town, they glare at me and make grimaces at me, and cry out, ‘This is thy work, thine, O minister of Hell!’ Fatherless babes and widowed mothers curse me and cry out against me. O my God, they say ‘This is all thy work — thine! ’’ For an instant he sat brooding over his thoughts in silence.

Then with a sudden, swift transformation which was characteristic of the man, his mood changed, and, springing up, he threw one arm affectionately about Meryl and smiled brightly.

“ Yet with such friends about me, how can I fail? ”

To his surprise, Meryl flung away his arm with a passionate movement and started back.

The poor priest’s sensitive face quivered.

“ What have I done? Richard, what is it? ” he cried.

“ Nay, nay, ’tis nothing, believe me, ” Meryl exclaimed, abashed instantly at his action. “ I was but startled and wist not what I did. Forgive me! ”

But, when Annys was gone, Matilda had not forgiven him.

"To act so rudely to our Robert Annys!" she cried reproachfully.

The young man did not reply at once, but stood with dogged sullenness regarding her fixedly.

"Why, what has come over thee, Richard? I do not know thee."

"You love him," he blurted out, awkwardly.

The blood rushed to the girl's face, even reddening her ears. For an instant she looked at him speechless, her breast heaving tumultuously and great tear-drops running down her cheeks. He was frightened at the effect of his brutal words.

"Forgive me," he stammered. "I meant not to hurt thee, but, Matilda, dear heart, there has never been other maid in the world for me."

"Oh, Richard, Richard," she sobbed, "he is a priest, a priest of God, and thou canst speak to me like this!"

"So, then, you wot not that the poor priests do marry."

At this she started violently, and all the color sped quickly from her cheeks.

"How—a priest wed!"

“Ay!” he said bitterly, seeing how it was with her. “Ay, John Ball hath preached for many a day that all priests should be as other men, even to the taking of a wife.”

“Oh, Richard, I wist not, I wist not. I thought a priest was above other men—I never thought of him as—as—” and she turned from him and flung her face in her arms on the table. And there he left her, for he had not that within him to comfort her, seeing that his own heart was broken.

XII

WITH his friends, Richard and Matilda, Annys continued the same frank intercourse, entirely ignorant of what had taken place between them.

Yet there were others besides Richard Meryl who had eyes to read Matilda's secret. Some there were that thought it a pity to see the unselfish devotion of a lifetime go so ill rewarded. For it was a question how the Westels could have lived had it not been that young Meryl had worked their tiny tenure of land, and rendered service in their stead, giving his lord two days' ploughing for himself and two for them, and in the same way doubling his days of sowing and reaping, digging and carting, that the women might keep their modest holding. In this Matilda had given him such help as had been in her power; nevertheless to her and hers he had been father, son, brother, lover, and day laborer, all in one. Others there were that, holding Matilda to be the ideal poor priest's wife, saw in it the hand of God.

Among those that read Matilda's heart was her cousin, Rose Westel, she whose mother had

thrown herself in her despair into the moat of Ely Castle. She had never encountered the poor priest. She was not fond of long, sanctimonious faces. It was just like Matilda, she thought, to fall in love with a russet cloth saint.

As Rose was about to start off one afternoon to her favorite haunt in the woods, where she could indulge in her day-dreams and for a brief space at least forget a reality that she hated, her grandmother stopped her.

"Why dost not stay at home and read the Scriptures with us?" she asked.

The girl turned and laughed merrily. "Oh, grandmother, for shame! Hast not said again and again that I am selfish and tread ever upon the feelings of others? And wouldst now have me interfere with Matilda and her devoted priest? Nay, then, 'twould be too cruel to come between them when they make such beautiful love over their 'Thus saith the Lords,' and their 'Holy, Holy, Holies.'"

Matilda sprang up with cheeks all aflame and fled into the house, vowing that she would never forgive her, never, never. But the old dame only chuckled slyly, in a manner that took away all the sting from the harsh words that she flung after Rose.

"Get thee gone, thou hussy! Get thee gone! Thou art fit only for saucy flings and idle noonings. Get thee gone before thy cousin's head is filled with the nonsense that is in thine empty pate!"

And when the girl had gone, she kept mumbling to herself with twinkling eyes, "*The hussy!* To take a priest and maid at Holy Scriptures and call it love-making!"

During the lesson that followed, Matilda for the first time was a dull pupil. Her grandmother, for a wonder, did not chide her for being so careless. Her sharp eyes had read the cause of the girl's confusion.

"Art tired, dear Matilda?" asked Annys kindly, seeing her hesitate over a simple word. "Thou art not thy usual quick self to-day."

For answer the girl burst into tears and sped quickly away.

"Heed not the lass," began the old woman, "she is not herself to-day. It seems that she and Richard have had a falling out, for after all these years that he has wooed her, she will have none of him. Yet he is a likely-looking chap, too, and I have scraped and pinched and at last laid by enough to pay the fine."

"What! Matilda not wed Richard!" exclaimed

Annys, astounded. "It's impossible! Sure, 'tis but some lover's quarrel that soon will be made up. Or else," he suggested, "belike she cares not to leave her grandmother."

Now who can tell what arouses the humors of old folk? Surely a smooth enough word, and kindly enough meant, yet the old woman sprang up with a red spot on either cheek, and cried harshly, "Hoity-toity, hoity-toity, Sir Poor Priest, indeed, indeed! And what should such a fine wench do but marry, quotha! Nay, nay, let not such foolish maggots get into the child's head."

Annys could not bring himself to believe that Matilda had refused to wed Richard Meryl. The two friends were as good as married in his eyes, for he could not think of one without the other. Surely some foolish lovers' quarrel must be at the bottom of it. So he took leave of the old woman and sought out Richard, bent upon being a peacemaker, and bringing the two together again.

He found his friend in the fields, up to his knees in a trench which he was digging. Richard laughed.

"How came you to think we were lovers?" he asked. He spoke carelessly, but the veins over his forehead stood out like whip-cords and his

great fists circled the spade handle so that the knuckles shone like polished wood.

"Dost mean to tell me thou hast no idea of wedding Matilda Westel?" asked Annys, in astonishment.

Richard shrugged his huge shoulders. "Nay, there is a clear field for thee, hast thou the mind to."

"Why, man, no sweeter woman draws breath."

The other drew a long breath between his clenched teeth.

"So says every swain of his sweetheart."

The words were indifferent, but the thick handle of the spade snapped in two.

Annys looked at it in surprise.

"'Twas cracked yestere'en," stammered Meryl, hastily looking down on it in some confusion.

For an instant the two men looked steadily into each other's eyes.

"I wot not how it is with thee," at last began Annys, gravely. "I had given my life that thou didst love the maid. I never looked on her sweet, gentle face that I did not see it in fancy bending over thy child's cradle. She was so wholly thine to me, that until this very day I wist not how dear she was to me."

His friend grasped his hand. "Ay, Robert

Annys, I cannot deceive thee. I had thought rather to see any other man dead than that he should possess her. Yet she loves thee, and the power to make her happy hath passed from me to thee. Only," he added, with a touch of sternness in his face, "only see that thou dost make her happy."

"Happy!" he said, "she will be happy if indeed it is as thou sayst and I can make her so. But I am bewildered. I cannot understand it that she should love me, and with thee before her. Thou art better favored than I, thou art younger and stronger. It cannot be; nay, there is some mistake."

"I tell thee there is no mistake. She loves thee."

"Did she tell you so?"

"Yea, that she did."

Then a hundred little scenes rushed back to him, her eyes fastened on his face, her interest in his work, her eager greeting on his return, all lived again for him for a brief moment. And now he knew.

"I am still dazed," he said. "I can scarce credit it, but I think it is true."

Then the thought of his friend's grief came to him.

"Ah, would that this had not come to thee, Richard, my lad. Would I could undo what I have wrought, even that I had never seen thee both."

"Nay, nay, say not that!" broke out Meryl, with strong pain in his voice. "Nay, it is worth all to have called thee friend. Sure there is a tie between man and man that may be stronger than that between man and maid."

"Ah well," sighed Annys, laying one hand tenderly on the young man's shoulder, "mayhap 'tis the Cross thou must bear for Christ's sake. For surely with such a woman by my side, it will be given me to prove that a wedded priest need not be taken up with worldly matters and thoughts of the flesh. Indeed, I shall be perfected in the work of the Lord. With her help I shall be a more useful servant to my people, a kindlier comforter and a wiser adviser. Indeed, I promise thee that she will be to me as a direct gift from God."

XIII

JUST at this time Rose Westel met with an adventure. She was paying a long-promised visit to some distant relatives at Ely. It was a great event in her life, for it was the first time she had left her home. Any change from the dull routine at the Bury was welcome, and yet, after the first excitement died down, she found herself unhappier than ever. The sight of Ely Castle proudly rearing its towers over the lowlands awakened in her a bitter discontent. The great grim pile stirred curious passions within her breast; there were times when she looked on it with an icy dread at her heart, for behind those curving walls rippled the waters of the moat—her mother's deathbed; there were moments when she looked on it with a secret pride that she should be descended from one of its haughty rulers. Then she would give way to frantic rage that she should not be there presiding as its mistress. It was common talk that the present Baron was only the illegitimate son of her father's brother. Why,

then, had he been chosen instead of her, who stood nearer in the succession?

No one suspected her of these outbursts, for she indulged in them only where she was unobserved. This habit had grown on her since she was a little tot, and her pride had kept her from showing how keenly she felt the shrugs and significant glances of the former companions of her mother. Their prophecies concerning her future were obvious, her own idleness and wilfulness being thrown into high relief by the contrasting industry and self-sacrifice of her cousin Matilda. There had been times when she had tried her best to hate Matilda, who was always being held up to her as a model, but Matilda's own love and admiration for her made it impossible.

So for many years she had alternated between tempestuous fits of determination to fulfil the kind prophecies of her mother's generation — to be out and out wicked and have done with it — and sullen resolutions to take the veil and enter the neighboring convent. The grawsome picture of her mother's waterlogged body floating on the moat had kept her from the one, a certain leer on the Father Confessor's face had kept her from the other. She never explained to any one why she had left off going to confession, for what

would have been the use? They would have said that she had inherited her mother's wickedness, so that even saints were tempted by her. She would never be judged as other maids.

Again and again she asked herself why had her mother sinned? It was her refusal to wed either of the two fellows whom her overlord had chosen for her that brought her to the Baron's notice. On seeing her he ceased to insist upon that special prerogative. What right had her mother to shrink from the churls that had been allotted to her? Her sin was so unnecessary that Rose looked on it with bitter impatience. The thick-flowing blood of the rustics had been in her veins; she should have been well content to wed some great bullock of a fellow and bear him countless stolid, flaxen-haired children. What right had she to bring into the world a being with every taste different from those about her, with every nerve tingling with revolt? True, Rose herself felt that she would knife a man before she would mate with one of those great hulks of men who were little above the oxen they drove or the sheep they tended. But she had the right to shudder; gentle blood flowed in her veins just as truly as it did in the proud Baron yonder. Just as much as he, she had a right to

feel her heart leap within her at the sight of luxury and daintiness and beauty. How her hands longed to feel the touch of soft furs and velvets and rich stuffs! Oh, again and again she wished that her mother had flung her babe also on the moat.

As she was sitting alone one day underneath the trees, near the highway, she was startled by the approach of a gay cavalcade bringing color and life and laughter into the gloomy woods. First rode the Baron, usually a superb figure on his magnificent coal-black horse, but now a most ridiculous figure with his clothes put on wrong side forward, his hat tilted over his nose, and long streamers of different colored ribands hanging from his beard, down his breast, and along his legs, where also hung numerous tiny bells tinkling with every motion. His horse was decorated as fantastically as its master, and behind him followed two score of lusty fellows decked out in motley liveries of green and yellow and covered with scarves and ribands and laces hung all over with gold. From each of these jangled and dangled countless silvern bells, heightening the din made by the pipers and drummers that followed, playing weird discords like a devil's dance. A number of ladies with their gallants, all masked

and gayly costumed, now rode up, all shrieking with laughter.

As the Baron caught sight of Rose standing near the road, gazing at the unwonted sight in open bewilderment, there swept into his eyes that look with which all men greeted her beauty. He whispered a command to one of his lackeys, who instantly seized the girl and conducted her to the Baron, who gazed down on her amazed—for how could it be that he had overlooked such a rare beauty in his vicinity? For the moment he regretted the escapade that made him cut so ridiculous a figure in her eyes.

“Thou must proclaim thyself a follower of my Lord of Misrule,” he said, smiling down at her and lifting up her chin with one gauntleted hand. She did not reply, but gazed on the ground in embarrassment, the color going and coming in her cheeks.

“Look, girl,” spoke up one of the Baron’s companions, “none may encounter us save they wear my Lord’s badge,” and with a leer, he attempted to fasten a knot of ribands on the girl’s kerchief. She made a quick gesture of impatience and stepped back angrily, but at a low word from the Baron she paused, and turned her exquisite profile toward him.

"Wilt refuse my badge?" he asked softly. She turned her face to him and curtsied, answering readily:—

"I need not that to make me a humble servant of your Lordship;" but her lips trembled and the blood was pumping noisily about her ears, and she found she could speak only in a strained whisper.

Some of the ladies clapped their hands at her readiness, and the Baron, with a light laugh, sprang from his horse and pinned on the badge, taking as long to do so as he possibly could, while the others looked on in amusement and made audible comments, even the ladies chuckling over the coarse badinage that was bandied about.

"Two groats for the badge, girl," cried one saucy fellow as the Baron at last reluctantly took his hands from the girl, and stood off in mock admiration of his own handiwork, "two groats!"

"I have no money," exclaimed Rose, sullenly. The interruption had jarred upon her. For a brief space she had fancied herself and the Baron alone in the world. De Leaufort turned angrily upon the fellow. "Who speaks of payment to a comely maid," he demanded.

"Ay, by St. Clara, a beauty like her needs no groat in her pocket, for she carries payment ever

in her face," spoke up another fellow, who had been watching the scene with considerable amusement. "I see the end of poor Lillian's reign," he muttered in his beard.

The Baron threw an arm about Rose's waist, and, drawing her to him, pressed a quick hot kiss on her lips. "I am richly paid," he cried, as she sprang from him and bounded off through the woods.

"Richly indeed!" echoed a couple of envious ones.

"And doubtless the treasury is not yet exhausted," laughed one who knew the Baron was not one to let such a beauty lightly slip through his fingers.

For an instant de Leaufort looked ruefully after the girl. She had not seemed to him a girl that would resent a kiss. At a whisper from a companion, however, he smiled, nodded his head, sprang into the saddle, and a moment later nothing but a cloud of dust rose where the gay cavalcade had rested. On they proceeded with a great din and racket, bringing out from every door they passed heads that shook with disapproval over the light-hearted gayety of the rich folks, and their careless misusing of fineries and good clothes, while the poor had to groan and

sweat even for such poor rags as they could find to cover their nakedness.

With the queer contradictions of maidenhood, which yearns and spurns all of a breath, Rose fled to her friends only to announce her sudden determination to return to the Bury the very next day. To all their pleas to persuade her to remain, she was obdurate, although a voice deep down within her pleaded their cause with even far greater eloquence than they could command. Indeed, no one could have been more surprised than herself at the sudden resolution. She had passed hours before the castle picturing all sorts of wild, impossible situations with herself as the heroine and the Baron as the hero, and yet, now that something had really happened, she ran away. There was a certain look in the Baron's eyes as his beard had swept across her cheek that told her with unfailing instinct that he would not lightly let her go from him. An exultant subconsciousness told her that, until he found her, there would be no woman in the world for him. And yet she was fleeing from him even as the startled stag at the scent of danger throws back its antlers and leaps through the forest. She questioned her own decision as impatiently as did her friends. She did not quite understand herself. Was there

deep down a desire to show her power, to heighten her charm, by giving him a little trouble in finding her? She could not say. She was not sure that she was not playing with her conscience and making a pretence of saving her soul. She knew only that a wild desire to run away possessed her, one too strong to be withstood. She merely obeyed her reigning impulse as she had done all her life. With the morrow a new one might come and then there would be plenty of time to yield to that.

XIV

THE day following his interview with Meryl, Annys was obliged to answer an urgent call from the men of a hamlet outside of the See of Ely. These people had refused to pay the tithes due to the Church, seeing that the rector was a man who had never seen those parts, and who had long since rented the church building to a precious couple who conducted there a highly profitable tavern.

Notwithstanding the strong case which the people surely had, the Church prepared to wage a bitter struggle to enforce its rights. For it would never do in the world to admit the principle that the people but paid for service rendered. Indeed, such an admission would end in the bankruptcy of many an entire diocese. The people craved the help and advice of Robert Annys. There was no doubt on which side he would be found. Meryl accompanied him part of the distance on his way to Gloucester to confer with the men of that neighborhood. He had asked for

some work to do that would help him forget his keen disappointment and that at the same time would take him from Matilda's presence. As the two men separated, they clasped hands warmly, and Meryl promised to do his utmost to gain strength and courage to take up again his life at the Bury. He was determined, however, not to return until Matilda and the poor priest were wedded.

Directly on the line of the hamlet where Annys was awaited, lay Colchester, in the county of Essex, on the outskirts of which dwelled the wife of the refugee who had been saved by the devotion of the Westels. Annys found her on the point of giving birth to a child, and kept from actual starvation only by the generosity of those who had but little more than she. When she learned from the poor priest that not alone her husband was safe, but that he was earning fair wages, a portion of which Annys bore for her in his wallet, her pinched face brightened. He was strangely touched by her broken murmurs of gratitude; never before had an expectant mother appealed to him in the same way. His heart warmed even toward the three-year-old fellow who peered at him dubiously from his mother's skirts. The knowledge that before long he would take unto

himself a wife was a leaven that leavened every thought and every act.

Although he endured great hardship tramping along the highway, with little rest and less food, although he bore with him always the heavy responsibilities he had assumed, nevertheless his fortnight of absence sped by as in a dream. He seemed to move in a new and strange world. His heart leapt within him because he experienced a totally new and more intimate sense of fellowship with the rest of mankind. There was given him a keener and profounder insight into their hearts. Scarce could he keep his eyes from the laborers who returned at nightfall from the fields and swung their tots over their heads. He followed funeral cortèges as they wound over hill and dale with tears dimming his eyes. A new understanding of the agony of separation came upon him. He thought much of his mother, who was but a beautiful memory to him. He wondered where she was buried, and resolved to discover her grave, if possible, and visit it to whisper to her his new-found happiness.

For there had long been growing within him the conviction that the Church could not truly be brought to the people until the clergy became

more a part of the people. The clergy could not truly minister to the people until they understood the people, until they shared the same hopes and joys, the same fears and sorrows. The great emotions that come with family life and family affections must be brought back to those that served men. He felt that the very completeness of the self-surrender that had been demanded by the early Fathers of the Church had struck a false note that had rung down the centuries,— the note of a cold egoism and isolation of spirit. With all the strength of his soul he rebelled against the cruel mandate of St. Jerome, which was responsible for much that was abnormal in the lives of the saints:—

“Though your little nephew twine his arms around your neck; though your mother, with dishevelled hair and tearing her robe asunder, point to the breast with which she suckled you; though your father fall down on the threshold before you, pass over your father’s body. Fly with tearless eyes to the banner of the cross. . . . Such chains as these, the love of God and fear of hell can easily break.”

This drying up of the commonest sources of affection, how could it spread the love and fellowship which were the essence of Christliness? Even the indomitable believer in celibacy, the great Hildebrand himself, had said:—

"From love to God to show love to one's neighbor . . . this I consider more than prayers, fastings, vigils, or other good works."

And what so readily and completely opens the heart to one's neighbor as to live that neighbor's life?

To watch the love-light of motherhood irradiate the features of your wife as her new-born babe is placed within her arms ; to watch the shadow of death creep over the tiny form of the little one you adore; in short, to suffer, to know, to weep, to laugh, as others suffer and know, and weep and laugh — that, and that only, is to love.

It was a deep-seated satisfaction to him that love had come to him as he had always prayed for it, — a beautiful, spiritual, uplifting experience. Love, he had always contended, was a holy thing. Had not Jesus used the simile of the bride and the bridegroom to express the love of the religious for her God, of the priest for his Church ? Nevertheless, over all the writings of the Fathers and the Saints a false and unhealthful asceticism had spread a morbid view of sexual love. Their pages were soiled by a horror of passion which in itself was a surrender to it. The very violence of their dread, the very vehemence of their agonies, spoke not only of a lack of self-control, but of a pru-

riency of imagination which would not have been present in a normal man. Gone utterly was the frank cleanliness of the Scriptures:—

“For he created all things that they might have being, and the generative powers of the world are healthsome, and there is no poison of destruction in them.”

And in its place came a distorted self-consciousness that was carried to absurd extremes. It caused one saint to cover his hands with rags before he would consent to carry his own mother across a bridge—a highly edifying incident which was related with much spiritual gusto by the saint's biographer.

The tortures of St. Anthony, the revelations of St. Augustine, the temptations of St. Benedict, were all to Robert Annys incomprehensible. He had never known his pulse to bound one beat the quicker at the sight of a woman. Women there had been who, stirred by his great beauty, had striven with such poor art as they possessed to awaken desire within him, but he had always put them aside calmly and passed on in the work of the Lord.

On his return he lost no time in seeking out Matilda. This time he needed no one to interpret the joy that surged up into her face as she

looked on him. He smiled tenderly on her as she told him of her doings during his absence, how she had nursed a girl through a terrible fever, how she had read the Gospel to many eager souls, how she had taught an old man his letters, how she had progressed with her grandmother's lessons. Then when she paused, and asked shyly, "Did thy pupil well?" he came close to her and took her hand.

"Well? Why, I could not have done half so well myself. Ah, I need thee, I need thee always. What sayst thou? Canst take me, a poor priest with no better lot to offer thee than that which my master hath enjoined upon me?"

"I shall love thee the better for it," she whispered.

"It will be no easy life. I will cherish thee dearly, yet never can I set thy desires above the call of duty," he said with a certain austerity, as if, even then, he was replying to the charges of the Hierarchy.

"I wish to help thee, not to hinder thee," was her instant reply. And in her face were a faith and an enthusiasm that would never waver.

"Ah, of a truth!" he said, "had Paul known thee, never would he have said a married man is careful only for the things of this world. Surely

now I shall belong more truly than ever to the Lord."

He bent over her and kissed her tenderly on her forehead. Her head, with its smooth, orderly golden braids, drooped shyly on to his shoulder, and her heart beat against his. His kiss was such as a brother bestows on a beloved sister, but her lips were too pure to know their loss.

He held her to him in sweet content at having found the wife he had dreamed of. He knew nothing of the love that burns and scorches, instead of soothing, and as he felt the deep peace of being in her presence and feeling her love like a benediction rest upon him, he marvelled yet again, as so often he had done in the past, how the Fathers of the Church could so have maligned the love of man for woman.

His vision stretched far along the future, seeing only peace in his life, and the crowning joy of a woman's touch which blunders not.

"The Lord hath been very gracious unto me," he said simply, looking down on her.

Then, at the sound of a light laugh, he turned and met the eyes of Rose Westel.

XV

SHE made a beautiful picture as she stood there with an inward tumult chasing the rich blood in and out her cheeks, and in her eyes a world of passion and rebellion. Always beautiful, there was a subtle tremulous excitement about her now which, as she gazed boldly at the young poor priest, leapt into his veins as flames leap into fagots. She was trembling from a revelation of her own self, and she had flown home in a wild mood, in which fear and recklessness and a certain exhilaration from which she could not escape, all had their part.

She possessed a figure that would have graced the more flowing robes of the gentles had they been permitted her, yet her skirt of bright green was hardly as scant as befitted her station in life. Her tight-fitting, sleeveless kirtle was of a dull brown, for she scorned the gown of one color which was commanded by law. Above the kirtle shone her bare, white neck. She wore about her waist a girdle of gold which some great lady

had once bestowed upon her, refusing to give it up even in the face of Parliament, which of late had protested vigorously against the extravagance of those who could not afford it, forbidding to any but a lady of high degree a girdle other than of plain linen.

From her quick run, the long red cap which should have covered her ears and neck had become disarranged, revealing a bit of her hair which was caught up in a net of wide meshes and in the sunlight shone like burnished mahogany. Her large hazel eyes had glints of brilliant gold at times, her lips were as the scarlet of frost-touched maples. There was about her a wonderful glow of vitality. Looking on her, a rush of life swept over one as a rush of salt-laden air sweeps over one who stands by the sea. Her coloring was not like that of any other woman. Merely to describe it as blonde or brunette would be like dipping one's brush into a palette of dull browns to paint the sunset. There was an indescribable brilliancy about her that made one think of an October day. She was the incarnation of the Autumn — a living, warm, radiant Autumn; not at all the Autumn of death and decay, of sobbing winds and whirling leaves, but a vivid, glowing Autumn, with all its own glory

of color, and yet with the freshness and looking-future-ward of the Spring.

She had been fleeing from a forester who had been sent in quest of her by the Baron de Leau-fort. He, inflamed by her beauty, set out on a bit of love-making on his own account. Not a bad-looking fellow he was in his way, his great figure set off splendidly by his livery of bright green, with the baudrick of cardinal tied about his shoulders and holding his horn. His sword and buckler hung to one side, and his mighty bow he bore in his hand, the brilliant peacock feathers of his arrows peeping from his full quiver. She had had no eye, however, for his charms, for her mind was full of the consciousness that the Baron had sent after her. But he at her side thought that not even the Lady Augusta, the Baron's beautiful sister, could compare with this rustic beauty, not my lady with her wimple of delicate sheer white stuff and her flowing robes of royal crimson embroidered with gold and outlined in ermine. Surely his Lordship had women in plenty to console himself with, and besides, he could say he had not been able to find her.

"By our Lady," he cried, "the Baron should know enough not to send another hunting for

him and the game so worth the having. Nay, 'tis not in human nature to expect me to bag you for him and not have a wee taste for myself."

Rose shrank from his touch. "Nay, be not too proud, little one. Big Harry hath met many a fine lady who hath not shrunk from his advances. A strapping fellow like myself, not so bad-looking, oft hath his uses not indented in the bond to his overlord. 'Tis easily accomplished if thou wilt come with me as my sweetheart; 'tis easy to tell the Baron that in some way thou hast slipped through his fingers and cannot be found. By to-morrow he'll have a dozen making him forget all about thee."

She suddenly was awake to his meaning. "Have a care, have a care, fellow," she cried. "This impudence shall not go unreported, I promise thee, and thine ears shall ring for it."

In a rage nothing could exceed the girl's beauty. Quite carried away by it, the fellow seized her about the waist and kissed her so fiercely and breathlessly that she could not scream. She felt herself drawn closer and closer to him, and his eyes burned into her; she noticed that they swam wildly in his head and showed their whites like a man who had lost his reason. As one hand loosened for an instant, she made a frantic effort

of her strength, and slipping from his clasp, she bounded away like a hare through the woods before he had recovered from his astonishment. She rushed on in a wild tumult. It had been quite different when the Baron had kissed her; now she felt degraded; tears of indignation and rage ran down her cheeks. She was furious to think that a forester of the Baron would dare so insult her. A forester indeed! That were to fall lower than her mother. And yet he was a likely-looking fellow and there was no denying it, there was something within her that responded to his wild love-making. As she first became aware of it she ran harder and harder, as if she could run away from herself. She wanted to escape something within her that made her afraid, but it was of no use, she might as well face it. She missed the strong pressure of the fellow's brawny arms; there was a somewhat deep down within her that wanted to see, just for an instant again, that peculiar expression in his face, — a somewhat that longed for that rain of hot kisses. There it was out! She had a horror of herself; on and on she sped, panting, panting. What was it that had come over her? She had fled from the fellow, her maidenhood had revolted, and she had escaped from him, but she could not

escape from the tumult he had stirred within her. So, then, she was a woman who could not remain unresponsive to a man's love-making, no matter who he be? Oh, shame! shame! was she to burn at the touch of every clodhopper, she who had thought herself so immeasurably above them all? There was no one to tell her that hers was merely a high-strung, overwrought temperament which responds when played upon as a delicate instrument responds to the slightest touch. It was no more within her power to be indifferent to the contact with passion than it was within the power of mercury to refuse to mark the changes in the temperature.

In this wild mood she had fled to her home, and come upon the young poor priest with his arm about her cousin. "Always love-making, love-making," she thought, "no end to it all." And yet this was no wild paroxysm before her, but a picture of calm joy and peace. Dimly she realized even then that to waken such love was not in her power, and for the first time in her life she caught herself actually envying her cousin Matilda.

"This is my cousin Rose," said Matilda. And then flinging both arms about Rose, she whispered in her ear, "Just think! We are going to be married. I must tell thee."

Rose smiled. She thought few would be surprised. She took Robert's hand in hers and clasped it warmly.

"She is a dear good girl," she said. "You will be very happy."

He found no answer on his tongue, and although he was fully conscious of the absurdity of it, he immediately proposed that Matilda bring the Bible and that they see how much progress she had made during his absence. He politely invited Rose to listen and to Matilda's surprise she readily acquiesced, she who had always scoffed at their Bible reading. Only she begged that the poor priest read instead of Matilda.

So in his exquisitely modulated voice he began :

"For the sovereign Lord of all will not refrain himself for any man's person, neither will he reverence greatness, because it is he that made both small and great."

But while his lips uttered those words his heart sang :—

"Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet,
And thy mouth is comely :
Thou art all fair, my love ;
And there is no spot in thee."

When Matilda started up, suddenly saying she had heard the voice of her grandmother calling, the heavy folio slipped unheeded from his knee, and he gazed steadily at Rose with eyes that bore

a look as if a thick veil had suddenly fallen from them. There was a world of pathos in his face, for he realized, even as he gazed on her, that nothing again could ever look to him as it had looked before this moment had come. Rose had watched him furtively while he read, surprised to find him so handsome. She had never seen him other than at a distance, for his coarse russet gown had repelled her. But now she observed with astonishment how beautiful were his deep-set, blue eyes, how noble his high forehead, how exquisitely moulded his lips and chin, how proud the carriage of his head. Everything about him, even his slender, delicate hands, spoke of a refinement far beyond even that of the Baron, for all his silks and embroideries. Prim little Matilda was not so foolish, then, after all !

As he looked on her, he saw with bewilderment all his well-laid plans come crashing to the ground. He had been so sure of himself (but self-pride had ever been his besetting sin). Here was a lesson in humility, indeed ! He understand the love of a woman ! He, forsooth, an ignorant youngster ! He, who but a half-hour ago (when he had been ages younger) had been willing to lay down the law to saints and martyrs ! Ignoramus ! Had he not held a woman's form to his and

praised God that his heart had not beat one stroke the quicker? Had not he pressed a kiss on a woman's brow and been thankful that there had been no unchaste thrill? Well did he know now with a sudden revelation that he could not so much as touch this woman's hand but the blood would mount like strong wine to his head. There was a touch of solemnity in his eyes as they rested on the face that was teaching him so much. When at last she stirred uneasily under his persistent gaze, it seemed to him as if hours, months, — years, had passed.

“Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my bride ;
Thou has ravished my heart
With one look from thine eyes.
With one chain of thy neck.”

She started at the low words which seemed to escape him involuntarily. Annys continued to gaze gravely on her, and came near to her.

“Why didst thou come into my life ?” he asked quietly.

Then after an instant's pause for the reply which did not come, he added hopelessly, with a weary sigh, “I had thought myself so happy.”

And then without one word more he was gone.

XVI

THE following morning, as Matilda accompanied Annys on an errand of mercy, she noticed his haggard face.

"I have passed the night in prayer," was all he vouchsafed to her anxious inquiries. He did not tell her what his prayer had been. Indeed, now that the morning had come, and Matilda was by his side, the long, sleepless night seemed as an evil dream.

They were on their way to an old man who was lying on the point of death, kept alive only by his strong yearning to be shrived by Robert Annys. Matilda had paid daily visits to the old man during the poor priest's absence. As Annys looked down on the good, strong woman by his side, he felt himself possessed by a new strength. He believed he would be able to shake off the spell that had come over him. He must keep near Matilda, he must not let her go from him. There was medicine in her perfect companionship.

As they paused before a dilapidated house on the edge of the woods, Rose came by.

"Ever going about comforting others," she hailed them in her light way; "in truth, wings will yet grow on the pair of you."

Matilda laughed, but Annys kept his eyes gravely on the door which stood ajar before him. A horrid, gasping sound came from within. Rose shuddered. "Ugh!" she cried, "how canst thou, Matilda, poke about in those filthy places? See, it is a perfect day. Come with me into the woods and go nutting."

Then as Matilda shook her head, she added in a sanctimonious tone, "Hast no pity for the poor nuts a-rotting on the cold hard ground?"

The words were addressed to Matilda, yet the man by her side read the invitation in them, his senses all astir.

"Oh, Rose, Rose," expostulated Matilda, "thou dost love to make thyself out far worse than thou art. Cease these gibes and enter with us; a sight of thy pretty face will gladden the poor soul."

But a look of disgust passed over Rose's face. "Go in there? I? B'r'r! Go near that horrid old man who fastens one rheumy eye on you while his slobbery chin shakes like a huge jelly? B'r'r!"

Annys's face was tense and hard. He never

turned his eyes from the door, yet the golden brown of her dancing eyes quivered before him, the scarlet of her full lips scorched into him. He was aware of every inch of her disdainful, impish presence as she stood there watching him from a corner of one eye. But without turning he bade Matilda follow him, and the two were swallowed up in the dim interior of the hovel. The girl outside shook with suppressed laughter, yet she bit her lip in some impatience and puffed out her cheeks in an odd little grimace.

Within, the old man lavishly poured blessings upon them both; upon Matilda for keeping her promise to bring the poor priest, upon him for coming.

“Never would I have seen this day,” he declared, “but for her. She did come every day, cheering me and helping me wait.”

Annys smiled tenderly on Matilda who stood blushing by his side. But even as he smiled, he was conscious of a strange red glow dancing before his eyes. Suddenly the old man sat up, and seizing Matilda’s hand in his bony fingers, placed it within the poor priest’s hand.

“That is right,” he whispered as he did so. “Bless you both—a pair of saints!”

Annys started violently and snatched his hand

away before he was aware of it. He was maddened by that glow which was everywhere, on the walls, on Matilda, on the straw where the old man lay, on the ghastly, emaciated face. He tried to recover his composure and sought to take Matilda's hand and press it, but she was visibly offended and withdrew from the bedside.

The invalid's sudden spark of vitality died down, leaving him barely conscious. Matilda left sadly, and Annys sank on his knees by the pallet, praying for the departing soul. When, half an hour later, he left the hut, it was to walk to the other end of the village where another sufferer awaited him. He walked on, his head bowed. He tried to fix his thoughts on the patient young girl whose last hours he was about to soothe, but the face that hovered before him had none of the pallor of death. Suddenly he was roused by a slight stirring before him, and he looked up startled to find himself in the thick of the woods, under a great chestnut tree, while before him was the bent form of Rose, gathering the nuts into a little basket. So, then, his feet had carried him there to her against his will! His face was even a shade paler than its wont, and his hands were clenched fiercely, as he turned about and walked rapidly in the opposite direction.

He had not been quick enough, however, to escape being seen, for as he left, the girl straightened herself and gazed after him. For a few seconds her shoulders shook with laughter, then suddenly her face sobered, and she bit her lips in vexation.

XVII

ALL that day and night Matilda brooded over Robert's strange behavior. Nevertheless, she greeted him calmly when, the next day, he approached while she was busily spinning before her door. Seeing Rose lying full length upon the grass, idly plucking handfuls of it and flinging them at Matilda, he hesitated. "Why do the feet of a lover lag?" Rose asked, impudently looking up at Annys. Matilda colored. She talked with Annys, while Rose looked on with an amused air. "Ah, Matilda, dear," she began after an instant, "after all, didst thou well to plight thy troth to a poor priest?"

"Wilt ever be serious?" asked her cousin, annoyed.

"I am as serious as a Bishop," she replied. "Indeed I have not seen him kiss thee once. Of a truth I have not."

Matilda vowed she would leave if another word were said of such nonsense. Rose smiled maliciously and watched the poor priest's set face,

while all sorts of pert sayings hovered on the end of her tongue.

"Old Silas died," announced Annys, gravely, "I have just come from there."

"And how is dear Betty?"

"I did not get to her last night," he said in some confusion. Rose laughed to herself. Matilda looked grieved. "Ah, the poor girl!" she said, "she longed for you so."

"Oh, these lovers will be the death of me!" broke out Rose, no longer able to contain herself. "Were I blessed with a lover, now, I vow it would not be of corpses and dying girls we would talk!"

"Be quiet, Rose!" exclaimed Matilda, sternly for her, "we talk of serious things."

"That's what I complain of!" pouted the irrepressible girl.

Matilda and Annys spoke together a few minutes in whispers.

At last flinging a handful of grass straight at him:—

"When will be the happy day?" she drawled.

He started nervously. "I have a journey to take," he said in a strained voice. "I leave to-morrow. I do not know just when I can return."

Rose's eyebrows lifted in surprise. Matilda regarded him anxiously.

"Yea, I have received an urgent call. I had come to tell thee."

But there had been no call, and Rose's mocking eyes seemed to read his subterfuge.

"Wilt return for the Fair?" she asked.

"Surely," he answered, "I have promised to be there. Men will gather there from every county."

"I will be there," she announced quickly, and then laughed to see the dismay in his face.

"And Matilda, too, surely?" he hastened to ask. But Matilda shook her head.

"I may not be spared," she said gently.

"Oh, yes, Matilda is the saint. I am the selfish, wilful one," laughed Rose, who seemed determined to make Annys uncomfortable.

"I must go to Betty now," Annys said. "Good-by, Matilda, I shall see thee soon again — immediately after the Fair." He kissed her on the forehead, and for the first time he felt her shrink from his touch.

"Be *sure* to return in time from that *important* mission!" Rose called after him. And Matilda looked at her, wondering.

He walked rapidly on, his mind in a whirl, taking no note of where he was going. That

sudden, unpremeditated lie agonized him. And yet, perhaps, after all, this lie would be his salvation. Perhaps once away from that girl with her maddening beauty he could cast off the spell she had wrought upon him. It was a daily torture to meet Matilda with a lie on his heart, to meet Rose was but a torture of another kind. Yes, he would go away for a brief spell.

Suddenly he found himself before the walls of the Monastery of the Bury St. Edmonds. For the first time he longed for the peace that was there. There, before him, was but the thickness of a few stones, and yet the men behind it, how immeasurably separated were they from the rest of the world! All the forces of nature — chains of mountains and the turbulent streams of the forests — had not in them the powers of isolation that rested in that wall erected by the hand of man. He stood without, in the midst of the strenuousness, the revolt, the passion, and sorrow of the world : they within were taken up and cared for as little children in the lap of some great-hearted Mother. The world and its ways and all worldliness went on far from them, and no sound of the battle of the forces, good and evil, ever was heard. An orderly and unbroken succession of tasks was laid out for them. They had

no difficult problems to weigh, no decisions to make. Ah, how he envied them for that! There was no fretting over the duty of the morrow or the day after the morrow, the mind was kept fixed on the duty of the moment; from this one passed imperceptibly to the duty of the hour, to the duty of the day. From Matin to Prime and from Prime to Tierce, from Tierce to Sexte, and Sexte to None, and again to Vespers and on to Compline, certain tasks that in no case may be missed or deferred: prayers to be chanted during the day; one hundred and fifty psalms of David divided so that the whole psalter should be chanted every week; the taking one's turn to be cook, or to wait upon the table in the refectory, or to read from some pious book while the others ate in silence. So, calmly, unresisting, one slipped down the gentle slope to death.

Ah, no wonder Alcuin had passionately lamented his cloister when he was called to the court of Charlemagne: —

“Oh, my sweet cell! and well-beloved home. Adieu forever!
Dear cell! I shall weep thee and regret thee always.”

But the solace of even a short sojourn within a Monastery was denied him—the excommunicated one. It had been easy for him to fling defiance to the Church when upheld by his sense

of righteousness, but now, no longer sinless, he yearned to kneel before the altar and be shrived.

In the course of his life it had come to him to determine what was the right thing to do — there had never been a question of knowing the right and not doing it. Now the right path lay clearly defined, without the slightest doubt, yet it was to be a life and death struggle to follow it. During the past few days he had pored for hours at a time over the "Lives of the Saints," reading again and again their denunciations of women, hoping to strengthen his purpose to prove that the love of woman could be pure. It was his most deeply cherished hope that his example in taking a wife like Matilda would lead to the establishment of a married clergy. Up to this moment, knowing the purity and nobility of his motives, he had not shrunk from the indignation of the Churchmen that was sure to break forth on his taking a woman openly in wedlock. And now he was obliged to admit to himself that he loved a woman whom it would be impossible to marry. Impossible because of his plighted troth to Matilda, but also — and that hurt deeper — because she was surely no ideal priest's wife. His high and mighty theories on the marriage of the clergy must vanish into thin air if he held up Rose as

a proper spouse for a priest of God. Rose to kneel before the leper and wash his feet! Rose to enter the homes of the afflicted and hunger-stricken and bring them comfort! No, there was nothing gained by trying to shut his eyes to the truth. He loved a woman who could not further one strong hope of his soul, who could not answer to one noble impulse.

“Give not thy soul unto a woman, that she should set her foot upon thy strength.”

But that was precisely what he had done. Every argument proved conclusively that he never ought to see Rose Westel again. But one might as well seek by argument to stop a raging flood from bearing down upon one as to attempt to argue away an emotion. There was no need to convince him that he ought to hate the woman who had so suddenly wrought ruin upon his most cherished hopes. A part of him did hate her—the rest of him adored.

There was prayer left to him. He had tried prayer with all the fervor of his tortured soul. The night before, following the advice of one of the Fathers, he had passed upon his knees reiterating only the one phrase,—

“Deus meus et Omnia.”

“My God and my All, My God and my All.”

His heart was overshadowed by the thought that God had surely withdrawn His love from him or He could not permit him to suffer so. Again and again he had flung himself on his knees and sobbed out the prayer uttered by St. Augustine when he was endeavoring to overcome the ways of his youth :—

“Thou, my Lord, how long yet? O Lord, how long yet wilt thou be angry? How long? How long? Why not in this hour put an end to my shame?”

It was easy when alone to ponder over such words as those of St. Jerome :—

“Love the knowledge of the Scriptures and thou wilt not love the lusts of the flesh.”

It was easy to feel the truth of St. Dominic’s admonition :—

“A man who governs his passions is master of the world. We must either command them or be enslaved to them. It is better to be the hammer than the anvil.”

All very admirable, yet they were but words, words, words. Excellent counsellings, wise reasonings, they were, but could they master one wild throb of his veins leaping in her presence? Could they make the vision of her one whit less

radiant and compelling? Had he created the world? Was it his fault or the fault of the Creator of all things that this great longing for her held him in subjection, and that until that was satisfied there was no peace for him in all the wide, wide world? The wildest thoughts ran through his mind at times. It was not too late, he would recant, and go back and enter the Church, and become a great and powerful prelate. He could yet live in a palace and offer her a fitting setting for her glorious beauty. If he closed his eyes he never failed to see himself in magnificent robes seated at the centre of the great table with her at his side. He could see the gleam of jewels as they rose and fell on her white bosom; he could see the light in her eyes as she turned toward him; he could feel the thrill from the touch of her soft white hands.

Yes, it was best to go and strive with all his might to forget Rose Westel, and return to the Bury with his honor unstained, return to keep his troth with Matilda.

He had promised to return immediately after the Fair. This great Fair of Stourbridge had for over a year been looked to as an important meeting place before the final rendezvous at Blackheath. It lacked now but a few days before its opening, for over a fortnight past it had been

officially proclaimed by officers going about the country forbidding any merchant to sell or exhibit for sale any goods in any place for a distance of seven leagues about, except inside the gates of the Fair.

Inside these gates there would be gathered people from leagues away on every side. It would be a precious opportunity, for in no wise else might the people gather together in great numbers without exciting suspicion. Here at the Fair, under the pretence of buying and trading, the most important conferences could take place, final arrangements for the great gathering be talked over, and the march on to the Maidstone gaol with ten thousand of men as Ball had foretold could be planned. Here minstrels could go about singing the songs that set the blood of the rustics a-tingling, so that they might be heartened for the long hard winter that yet lay before them.

XVIII

THE morning of the opening of the Fair found Annys, together with hundreds of others, tramping along the road to Stourbridge. From the very earliest sign of dawn the highway had bustled with life. The people poured in from all sides,—from as far north as Norwich and Kings Lynn and Marham, and from Colchester and Mile End in the east, and Oxford in the west, and Maidstone and Tunbridge and Guildford in the south, and even from the great city of London they came. For weeks the whole southeast corner of England had been in a turmoil of preparation. The harbors of the seaport towns, Blakeney and Colchester and Lynn and Norwich, had been filled with foreign vessels, swarming with swarthy-faced sailors from the Mediterranean and tow-haired sailors from the North Sea. All these were doubly welcome, for not only they brought trade to the towns, but news, news of far-off lands and far-off peoples. The relation of man to man had a freshness, a piquancy in those days, for one told

the other of what was happening in the world, and so each man was then a bearer of news, and not a mere commentator on news already known.

Walking along the highway and jostling one another, there were to be found belated merchants, with heavy hearts hurrying to plead for a place in the Fair; bailiffs bent on their masters' business, securing more canvas or the best mill-stones from the south of France, or horses for the field, or any of the thousand things that it was their duty to see were on hand; nobles themselves travelling in great state to select a fine war-horse from Spain, or from the same land some rich, rare wine with the sun taken prisoner in it; some knight to try curiously wrought armor from Milan; ladies on palfreys with their hearts set on some jewels or fine robes; monks telling their beads; nuns with eyes modestly cast down; smiths seeking for iron; pardoners and pedlers seeking for profit, acrobats and showmen all after the careless penny of the loiterer; beggars in plenty; scholars from the Universities;—as the poet sang,—

“All manner of men, the mean and the rich, working and wandering as the world asketh.”

Once within the gates, Annys found himself surrounded by a most bewildering Babel,—

merchants crying their wares, jugglers proclaiming their feats, drug-sellers holding forth on the peculiar virtues of their medicines and ointments, pardoners praising their charms, swine grunting disapproval, horses neighing with impatience, girls exclaiming in delight and wonder, boys tooting tin horns, deep voices, shrill voices, laughs, sneers, jests, oaths, upbraiding, crowing, gobbling, stamping, halloes,—Italian, Norwegian, Russian, Dutch, German, French, Spanish, and English all jumbled together. It was enough to madden a man, unless he plunged into the immediate work of making as much noise as his neighbor. Yet the vast majority seemed in good spirits, and many articles changed hands, and all went merrily enough; and if some dispute did wax too high for comfort, the brawlers were led in a trice to the court of the dusty feet, where either the dignified Mayor of Cambridge or his deputy sat all day and all night, and woe to the man that thought there was appeal from his decision.

Annys looked about him with great interest. A great cornfield half a mile square had been dug up and laid out into streets. The owner of the corn had hurried in his harvest before the last week in August, for had he been caught with his corn still on the stalk, the builder of the booths

then had the right to destroy the corn. On the other hand, when the Fair was over it was the turn of the builder to hasten, for if the booths were not removed before Michaelmas day, the owner of the soil had the right to destroy them. Turn about is fair play. The only compensation which the owner of the land received for the use of his land was its additional fertility after so large a concourse of persons had thronged there.

Each important trade had its own street or double row of booths, with a sign swinging high with the name of the street painted conspicuously upon it. As the name was in each case borrowed for the occasion from some town street where the trade was permanently concentrated, there was brought to the little English village a quaint flavor of cosmopolitanism. Memories of London and Bruges and Paris and Venice stirred in the breeze. For a time Annys walked up and down, so much interested in what he saw that he neglected to look for the signal with which the members of the secret society always greeted one another. There was something marvellously exhilarating to him in this contact with men from all parts of the world. Here was a man who, but a few months ago, might have kneeled before the throne of the Pope, and here was another who

might have come straight from the luxurious palace at Avignon, where the Anti-pope held his court. Here was one whose ancestors surely saw the red cross of the Crusaders waving at the gates of Palestine, and here one who had within him the blood of those hardy Norsemen who descended upon the English coast with all the fury and compelling force of the fierce storms that drove along their boats.

He walked through one street after another, never tiring of the wonderful sights. He stopped before the booths and stood gaping like a little child, receiving, however, scant enough encouragement from the merchants, who would have preferred to give ground space to a customer more profitable than a poor priest. There were streets where merchants with precious stocks of Eastern produce vied with one another, Venetians and Genoese, to attract the eye of the connoisseur; others where Italian silks and velvets tempted the rich; and others yet where delicate glassware dazzled the eye with glints of exquisite color. And still more merchants from Italy showed spices as their bait,—spices without which no meal were palatable,—pepper and cinnamon, mace and ginger, cloves, and canel, collected in the far East, and reaching the Mediterranean

only after a long and tedious journey. Then there were men from the south of France, and Greeks as well, with raisins, figs, currants, galangale, almonds, rice, and licorice. And there were dates from Egypt and sugars from Sicily and Cyprus and Alexandria.

Gascons there were who needed not their celebrated wines to make them expansive and good-humored; big-boned men from the Hanseatic towns with furs and amber beads and precious stones from the East, reaching them from Moscow and Novgorod; and Flemish weavers with the coveted linens of Liège and Ghent; and hardy Norwegians with tar and pitch from their unending forests of pine.

All this had been brought to England's shores in many vessels, reaching Stourbridge in smaller boats by way of the rivers Ouse and Cam; but from England itself there had come, first in importance, the great wool packs that were the envy of other nations, and tin from the mines of Cornwall, lead from the mines of Derbyshire, iron from the forges of Sussex, and, most important, salt from the springs of Worcestershire; for woe to the bailiff who fell short of salt for his stock!

How Annys revelled in all this tumult and bustle of trade! The struggle which he had

waged with himself had drawn his thoughts away from their usual current, but now his heart within him panted for action. The longing for the peace of the monastery faded away utterly, and in its place arose the strong joy of living, of fighting, of sharing one's life with a brother, and of living for that brother—which was the very essence of his creed. He had passed through an evil nightmare. He was awake now, and he drew deep breaths to know that he was a free man again; and now he looked eagerly about him for a sign of a familiar face, for he could scarce wait until he should begin planning and discussing again the details of the great rendezvous at Blackheath.

Suddenly he found that it was impossible to make further headway, for the crowd pressed too thickly about him. He allowed himself to be pushed along until, by craning his neck, he could see what was the cause of the excitement.

A man standing upon a carpeted platform was vehemently holding forth upon the virtues of his wares. The crowd could not catch all that he was saying.

“Hush! hush!”

“Let us hear what he has to say!”

“Quiet! quiet!”

“Here it is, here it is, my good fellows,” the

man was saying, in a loud, singsong voice. "Do not lose this precious opportunity of protecting yourselves at a trifling cost against all sickness and pestilence. Look! you see it is still red and flowing, after all these years, which proves it is as I say. It can never congeal." And he held high above their heads, so that all might see, a small vial with some red fluid shaking in it. "This is some of the precious blood of Christ, caught while it was dripping away from Him on the cross. Remember, no one can be taken with the black vomit while in the possession of this vial."

A man stepped forward and purchased the precious vial, not, however, without some sharp haggling over its price.

"And now," continued the pardoner, seeing that he had attracted a sufficient crowd about him, "and now do I not see some youth who has loved more hotly than wisely, and who would like a charm to spare the maid all pain? Here is an Agnus Dei," he cried, holding up a small wax medal. "Remember, it will be six years more before his most Holy Reverence, the Pope, blesses a new stock; remember, the possession of this wipes away sin; it protects one from the fury of winds and tempests, and one cannot be hurt even by fire."

"Sell it not, then, O monk, I beg," cried a voice from the crowd, "for it may come of great use to you in the future life."

The monk grinned in appreciation of the joke.
‘But I could not find it in my heart to keep it from yonder young man who needs it so sorely for his sweetheart.’

All eyes turned curiously towards a stalwart young fellow who was trying to escape with a buxom young woman clinging to his arm. It was evident that the monk’s shrewd eyes had read the situation rightly, and as no joke was too coarse for a mediæval crowd, the merriment was quite open and unconcealed. The fellow looked sheepish, the girl’s face was aflame and the tears stood in her eyes, yet the crowd guffawed heartily. “Remember,” cried the monk in one more desperate attempt, “in accouchement, mother and infant both are saved,” but the couple had succeeded in making their escape.

“Hold!” exclaimed a stout and prosperous-looking merchant, “must all the world give way before lovers? I, too, have my needs, for I brave many a tempest in the course of my wanderings.”

“Ay,” replied the monk, “take it for safe travel, and it is well to remember that it will take a certain temptation of the flesh away from thee,

and the Lord knows there is evil enough in the world."

Then he singled out a big bailiff who looked as if he lived off the fat of his master's land, and endeavored to sell him a scapular which if worn over the back and stomach insured perfect continency, incidentally at the same time protecting the wearer from all the torments of Hell, powers of the Evil One, etc., etc. The crowd roared with delight over the discomfiture of the bailiff, whose puffy cheeks became purple with anger.

"Ho, ho!" they cried, "take it, Sir Bailiff, and mend thy ways. 'Tis known thy knees are already worn with praying for what the scapular will accomplish without further effort on thy part."

"Here," cried the bailiff, throwing the monk a coin, "enough! I'll pay for it, but it suits not the temper of my blood. Throw it, instead, and welcome, over the shoulders of yonder poor priest who looks as if it would not trouble him any to go without certain good things of life."

The crowd turned about and craned their necks to have a good look at Annys, who merely smiled and suggested that it be not wasted on one who did not need it. Then the monk caught sight of him for the first time.

"Oh, good Morrow, 'tis my famous pontiff, good

morrow," he cried. Annys nodded shortly in return to Stott, whom he had long before recognized, and tried to pass on. He had witnessed enough of the superstition and folly of the people, and his heart was heavy within him. But Stott would not have it so. "Ah, Sir Russet-priest," he called after him, "I wot well you do not approve of all this, yet have you it in your heart to turn away as I am about to offer my very choicest treasure of all?"

The crowd squeezed closer to the carpeted platform, and Annys could not have made his way through now had he wished to. A thin, anxious-looking merchant, in his stall opposite, who had come from afar and saw that his wares were not going as were the wares of this pardon-seller, looked on sadly and murmured impatiently in his beard against all pardon-sellers and humbugs.

"Now give heed, dear people," began Stott in an unctuous tone, and from the manner in which the words rolled easily from his tongue it was evident that he had often recited the story before.

"Ye have all heard of the Blessed Virgin sister Jeanne of the Cross of the third order of St. Francis, and of her great piousness, and in what great reverence she was held, and how all the birds flocked to

hear her preach, and when she prayed the flowers in the vases bowed at the Gloria Patri."

How the simple people delighted in those tales! Indeed, the highly diverting tales of the saints and the miracles that they performed were to them novels, dramas, and exhortations all in one. Their imaginative curiosity was captivated at the same time that their faith was strengthened.

"Well, one day the nuns came to her, who was their Mother Superior, and begged her to obtain the blessing of Jesus Christ Himself for their rosaries. So she placed all that they gave to her in a great casket which she locked securely, retaining the key of it herself. The next day all the rosaries were gone and the casket perfectly empty. Then, while the Virgin remained on her knees praying, the chapel was suddenly filled with the most delicious and wonderful odor, and on going to the casket they found the rosaries again there."

A shiver of interest ran through the audience. They listened as children listen to some delightful fairy tale, the more familiar, the more delightful.

"Now it is well known," continued the monk, "that a very special grace is attached to these rosaries, not only to all the rosaries blessed by Christ Himself, but to each individual bead of each rosary."

Annys wondered if the fellow would have the

effrontery to pretend that he had with him one of those rosaries, which were so precious as to be guarded night and day in the chapel, as, indeed, if they were stolen the principal source of the monastery's income would go with them. Stott's beady little eyes twinkled as if he read the thought of his critic. They seemed to say, "Not so fast, Sir Russet-priest, wait a bit!"

"Now follow me carefully," he went on; "recollect that by the peculiar virtues of these beads the same virtue passes out to every bead that touches one of them. These rosaries which I have here have lain for one whole night in the casket with the original beads."

Annys could not but laugh at the ingenuity of the fellow, and he now passed slowly on, while behind him he could for some time hear the harsh, monotonous voice reciting:—

"It quiets storms, cures pestilence, prevents temptations against the Faith, puts out flames."

"Ha!" exclaimed a stalwart smith, recognizing Annys and bringing one great hand down on his slender shoulder so that the young man winced. "Ha, does it so? Puts out flames? Then these bailiffs here, if they know their business, will not lose a minute in securing them for their masters, and it might be well for every

Baron and Abbott in the land to get one, for, by Heaven, if— ”

The rest was lost in Annys's hand, which he closed tightly over the smith's mouth.

“ Hist! ” he cried at the same time, with a warning gesture.

“ Oh, I am heartily sick of caution,” cried the smith, “ my hand itches for the torch. It cannot be laid on too soon for me.”

“ Nay,” Annys exclaimed, “ the 'torch would be but a poor friend indeed. But come where we can talk more privily. A little patience, my friend.”

“ Oh, patience, patience,” cried the fellow, bitterly, but striding after the poor priest.

“ A pardon, a pardon,” begged a poor woman, approaching Annys with outstretched palm.

Annys smiled and handed her one which she took eagerly.

Later on, it caused much discussion, for when its Latin was translated it proved to be no pardon at all. He had given her a piece of paper on which was written:—

“ Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam.”

It looked proper enough and like unto the usual Latin prayer that was written on such pardons,

but in plain English it turned out to be only a homely piece of advice taken from Piers the Ploughman:—

“Those who do well shall go into everlasting life.”

These russet priests! There's no telling the tricks they will play!

XIX

THE two made their way, not without some difficulty, towards the part of the fair grounds where the sheep were for sale. This was the spot selected by the leaders of the rebellion. Merchants and chapmen on all sides of them were shouting encouragement for the passers-by to stop and purchase of them.

“Wimples, wimples! Sure ’tis not in thy heart to refuse thy lass to bind up her pretty hair with one of these.”

“Girdles! here they are, silver and gold of the finest.”

“Crosses, crosses, jewelled, inlaid, carved ivory crucifixes. Here is a glowing gem for my lady’s prie-dieux.”

“Here, Sir Knight, give this altar cloth to Holy Church and receive many days’ grace for it—one day for each thread in this golden fringe.”

“Furs, furs, the cold winter will soon be upon us. Overlook not my choice stock of ermines and beaver.”

"Faugh!" cried a man passing by. "'Cold winter,' indeed; one would think to hear these fellows that the aim of the great folks is to keep warm with the fur they pile upon their garments."

"Well, mayhap they try to keep warm the ground," joined in another, "for they do stick their furs about the tails of their gowns instead of about their necks and wrists, where there would be some sense to it."

"Talking of tails," grinned a man who was a tailor by trade, "why, it will come about shortly that no workshop in all the land will be large enough to cut out a fine robe if the trains grow much longer. We shall all of us have to take to the fields to cut out our gowns."

"Indeed," said another, "I cannot for the life of me see any reason for the wearing of fur save it is as a hiding-place for fleas."

"There you are in error," retorted the tailor, who was also a bit of a philosopher; "you forget that it is forbidden by law to all but the great folk to wear fur, ergo do not say that it hath no uses. Remember an article is prized just so far as it is difficult for others to get it."

The voices of the merchants, always persuasive, continued to reach Annys and his companion. "Here you are, my beauties. Don't pass by.

Here is the famous recipe to keep the skin ever white and smooth, of sweet almonds blanched, of gum dragant and of gum arabic, of the flower of beans, of the root of the fleur-de-lis, of dried fish glue— ”

“ Give not away all thy secrets, fellow,” interrupted a passer-by, with a laugh; “ we can all go home and make up thy recipe for ourselves.”

“ Ah, but you will not know the correct proportions, and without that the virtue of the compound is not there,” replied the man, no whit disconcerted.

“ Ointments, ointments, rare and precious ointments,” cried a rival, “ musks, vermillion lip salves, clothes of pure scarlet dye to keep the cheeks ever young. Ah, lass, just approach here and see if a touch of this on thy cheeks does not make thy fellow come hurrying back to thee.”

“ Waters of daffodils,” from the other side.

“ Grape juice and tarragon mixed, sweet waters of oranges, roses, jessamine,” flung back from opposite.

And at last they heard about them the kind of talk that showed they had reached their destination.

“ Nay, I have rubbed my fingers off me and the skin yet keeps pale. I tell ye 'tis rotten, and I'll none of it.”

"Why, man, look you, pull on that wool, and you could not tear it, had you the strength of Hercules."

"If the hoar frost of the morning melt on the wool, be sure there is an unnatural heat somewhere."

"I tell you the veins under the eyes are white. Do you need further proof?"

"And I tell thee a ruby could not be redder."

Yet with all the talk going on about them of sheep and their distempers, men nevertheless found opportunity to greet one another with the secret signal which showed that they were members of the Great Society.

"June the twelfth, then?"

"So long?"

"Plenty to do 'twixt now and then."

"Hush!"

"And I tell thee what to do with a sheep that dies."

"The whole country is to rise. There will not remain one man at the plough — as I was saying, soak the flesh well in water and keep it there from daybreak till noones, and —"

"Wot ye, whether the men of Hertforshire are with us?"

"And keep it and drain it thoroughly and salt it and dry it, and it will do for your laborers."

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Ho, ho, ho!”

“Yea, there be not one man who is not ready to join in the march.”

“And if there be one unready, we know an argument or two that will bring him around.”

“Here be Robert Annys and Jack the smith.”

The greetings exchanged were hearty.

The men spoke cautiously among themselves, every now and then interjecting some talk of sheep into their conversation when one approached who did not give the signal.

“I tell you, from Lincolnshire to Sussex the country is like dry timber ready to ignite at a spark.”

“Ay, come next Whitsunday, please God, the lords will know who are the real masters.”

“The land will not groan under so many sheriffs.”

“And not so many lawyers will cumber the ground.”

“Ah, my men, have a care, have a care,” broke in Annys, “lest they do say with reason that we are but ne'er-do-wells grasping for power. If envy and greed are thought to be prodding us on, our cause is as good as lost.”

“Well, they have had their day long enough,” grumbled the sturdy smith.

Wat the cobbler, ever ready to make the peace, now joined in. "Hast got big Ben and his men to join us?" he asked of the smith.

"Well," was the answer, "I left him swaying this way and that like a tree that yet needs the last stroke to fall."

"Let us look to it, then, that the last stroke be not put in by the other side," was the ready reply.

"Who will go to Kent and see that all is in readiness for the march on the gaol? There must be no half-hearted ones there."

"To go to Kent now is to clap one's head into the Archbishop's noose," replied a Kentish man. "Ball's boast that he would be set free by hundreds of men marching from afar hath made even the sheriffs look alive."

"I will go," said Annys, quietly.

"No russet priest may show his face near Canterbury."

"Then shall I go disguised as a minstrel, and men shall know me by my songs."

"And get a broken pate for thy pains," said a disgruntled minstrel, who well knew of what he spoke.

"Oh, the cause must not suffer for want of a broken pate or two," replied Annys, merrily. But the truth was he really welcomed the oppor-

tunity with all his heart. He wanted work, and work with the zest of danger in it was all the better. He wanted some absorbing task, some task that would claim his whole mind and soul, that would shut out from him the terrible struggle that he had been waging for the past few days.

When he left the Fair with all the details arranged to slip off secretly to Kent, he held his head higher than he had done for many a day. Now he was a man again, now he had cast off that evil self, he was ready to sacrifice himself for his fellow-men, ready to lay down his life for them if need be. Work, work, work—that was man's salvation from temptation; not physical torture and isolation, but work that meant a flinging of the whole being into some great interest, swallowing up every thought unconnected with it. As he walked rapidly along, that Robert Annys who had permitted himself to become so harassed by a passing lovesickness seemed like some other man. Surely it could not have been he, Robert Annys, Saviour of the Oppressed, Leader of the Downtrodden People, Teacher of the Peasants, Prophet of the New Era!

The Devil likes nothing better than a cock-sure opponent.

That moment, as he entered an unfrequented lane, with his heart beating high with the exaltation of his dangerous mission, with his whole soul uplifted in the thought that he was holding men's destinies in his hands, he saw Rose sitting alone. His heart gave a great leap within him, nevertheless he passed on, pretending not to see her.

Rose grimaced. She sent a slipper after him, hitting him full between the shoulders.

"Is that cousinly?" she cried, in her teasing way. He paused, trembling, yet able to keep his face turned from her.

"Cousin! Cousin! Cousin!" mocked the low voice. He turned. He looked at her, and suddenly a great wave arose within him and engulfed the Great Uprising, the Secret Society, the Rescue, the Gathering at Blackheath — all — all save just one maid and she before him.

The hoarse voices of the men behind, the noises of the Fair, smote upon him, yet nothing seemed real save Rose, sitting there with a splendid, vivid sense of life pulsating through her, the shadow of her long lashes resting on her cheeks.

"Cousin indeed!" he said, with a sob in his voice, "thou knowest well that can never be!"

He clasped both her hands in his.

"I sought to flee thee," he said, with a strange directness.

She smiled and tried to withdraw her hands. But he would not relinquish them and held them fast.

"But I will not flee thee now," he went on. "I have done with struggling. It is useless."

"Nay," he added, with the superb assurance of all lovers to whom eternity is but a passing breath, "I shall never leave thee more."

Rose was not accustomed to analyze her feelings. She acted first and thought afterward—if at all, which was doubtful. But she was puzzled at her conflicting emotions as she sat there thrilling to the passion in his eyes. Her whole body throbbed and trembled in unison with his bounding pulses. She wanted to dismiss him with a scolding for his faithlessness to dear little Matilda. And she wanted to tell him that she was in love with another. Surely all men save the Baron were indifferent to her! Indeed, she had been dreaming of de Leaufort just before this impertinent poor priest had come and disturbed her. She had closed her eyes and felt distinctly the Baron's soft beard brush her cheeks; some faint, elusive perfume that tantalized her memory had entered into her senses; she had sunk into

a delicious revery that almost approached a swoon. She was in a dangerously emotional mood. There is an early stage in the love affairs of an emotional woman when she is in love, as has before been said, not as she thinks, with a certain man, but with the powerful emotions which he can arouse. And, it may be added, at such a stage to dream of her lover is not, as she fondly believes, to harden herself against all other comers, but on the contrary it is to break down all the barriers before them. The wise rival is he who knows how to seize upon the psychological moment and urge his suit in no faint-hearted manner. Later on there will come the time when every line of the chosen one's countenance, every trick of manner and speech, have entered into the very warp and woof of her love. Then stand off, it is too late ! The image on the sensitive plate of the heart is fixed, no longer is it a vague shadow, easily blurred or superseded !

They said nothing. There was no need of speech. Speech after all is needed only for those poor mortals whose feet rest on the earth. There is an eloquent, tumultuous speech of lovers which is felt, not heard. Their palms beat wildly one into the other, their lips grew dry, they drew long, deep, quivering breaths.

Then, when he kissed her full red lips,—the first time he had kissed a woman's lips,—it came over him that this exquisite creature was no companion for a poor russet priest.

He raised her hand to his lips. “How came you to love a poor priest!” he exclaimed, wondering.

“I love the Bishop in you,” she answered, laughing.

“Ah, 'tis a long way from an excommunicated poor priest to a Bishop.”

“Nay,” she pouted, “I shall have a palace.”

He thought her beauty worthy of a king, and told her so.-

“Then make me a queen!” she cried impudently. “Yea, a great lady, a great prelate's lady. I can adorn a palace, think you, then a palace, a palace give me!”

He tried to take her in fun: “Ay, a palace, a palace. They grow in the fields—pick me one!”

“Laugh not, I mean a real palace of stone. Look not so dazed. Was not the Archdeaconate of Ely offered you? You shall yet have a Bishopric.”

“But that was long ago!”

“Humph! 'long ago,' and will not the Church be gladder than ever to take back the poor priest

who can hold so many men from the Uprising?"

What was all this? It was madness. He had given himself to the people, he could never recant.

She kissed his hands.

"These fingers will yet hold a Bishop's staff," she said. Her beauty was maddening. He would not think of the future. He gave himself up to the present. The breath from her lips shook him to the very core of his being. He rained kisses on her passionately—on hair, cheeks, eyes, and lips; and for all that there was a certain fierceness in his caresses, she was unafraid and well content to have it so.

Suddenly a jeering laugh rang through the air:—

"Ha, ha, Sir Russet-priest, so this is the way you follow the call of your dear Master, Jesus Christ! 'Wheresoever my Master calls me,' I think you said to me. Ho, ho, odsooks! did the good Lord graciously call me into so fair a place, I doubt not I should go even as willingly." The two sprang apart and saw the evil face of Hugo Stott leering at them. Rose was frankly frightened and turned again and clung to Annys, whose first impulse was such as any man would feel, to strike the impudent fellow to the ground. But an

uncomfortable trick had grown upon him of recalling certain bits of the Gospel at all moments of excitement, and the particular lines that now rang through his brain had in them an appositeness that staid his hand:—

“If thou give fully to thy soul the delight of her desire, she will make thee the laughing-stock of thine enemies.”

Indeed, it had come. Already he was the laughing-stock of his enemy. He was degraded before the very scum of the earth. He had brought the name of his beloved Lord on the lips of a sneering pardon-seller. He was held up, a self-convicted hypocrite, before the very prince of hypocrites. What could he say for himself? What could he plead? Nothing, save that he was in the grasp of the same terrible power that had brought ruin to hundreds before him. Ah! but stay, he had done wrong, great wrong; he had sinned grievously, yet by some miraculous interposition of the Lord he had been drawn back from the last step that would have cast him into the pit of hell. He had been saved. And by what a hand! Yet, although it had pleased Heaven to send a strange instrument of salvation, nevertheless, he must render due thanks to his deliverer. So, to Stott’s utter surprise, instead of

felling him to the earth, Annys flung off the girl and extended his hand humbly to him.

"Thanks," he said contritely. "Thou hast snatched me from the jaws of hell."

Stott could scarce believe his eyes, for he was but too ready to believe that Robert Annys was as the usual run of the priests he encountered, ever ready to preach, but not so ready to practise.

In the sudden religious exaltation that swept over him Annys was totally unconscious of his cruelty toward the woman whom he had just clasped in his arms. He could think only of his own wonderful escape. Rose rested on the ground as she had been flung, half reclining, half kneeling, dazed at the sudden change that had come over the ardent lover of a minute before. The uppermost thought in her mind was how handsome he looked in his new-found indignation. His eyes, at other times the pale blue eyes of a dreamer, now scintillated as the dark blue night sky, when the air is crisp and clear and thrilling with the glory of the stars. Deep down within her lay a discontent that all his passion for her had awakened in his eyes no such splendor. She longed to be able to awaken that light in his eyes purely for herself alone; she was fascinated by the peculiar change it wrought in his face; she

found a certain pleasure in watching him impersonally, quite as if the object of his indignation were some one else and not herself at all.

As he drew himself up and looked down upon the girl, her beauty seemed to him surely of the Evil One. There rushed over him a horror that he could have succumbed so easily to the temptation that befalls every anchorite. What? was it possible that he, Robert Annys, had been ready but an instant ago to deny his people, to draw them from their most sacred cause, ready to desert the great-hearted leader to whom he had sworn lealty, all for this woman before him? Could one fall lower than this? He had been all too willing to trail the fair robes of the Holy Spouse in the dust to keep this creature by his side. He had listened to her pleadings to make himself a great prelate solely that he might twine golden chains in her locks; he to set yet another example before the people of rapacity and sensuality within the Church, and thereby discourage by so much every honest reformer! God! what wonder that he took it all as a manifestation of the powers of the Evil One? If a mage had appeared unto him and showed him a magnet which drew to it all the trees of the forest, one by one, until they all lay upturned and useless, with

great gaping wounds in the earth, where, but a moment before, they had risen proudly, would he not have declared him a sorcerer, and taken him to some holy man to have him purged of his devil? or had him burned publicly at the stake? And what else but some evil sorcery could draw a man from the place where he had been rooted deep down, could sever his heart at a blow from all the things that he held sacred, and could leave him prostrate and useless, a cause of stumbling to the wayfarer?

He had been saved at the eleventh hour by divine interposition. His soul quivered with joy at again being accepted of the Lord. He raised his crucifix high over the crouching figure of the girl, and, after crossing himself on the breast and shoulders, he launched forth the terrible words of exorcism :—

“Satan, enemy of the Faith, enemy of the human race, who brought Death into the world, who has rebelled against all justice, seducer of man, root of all evil, promoter of all vices, come out, come out, I command you, from the body of this woman. Come forth, come forth, I command you, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

At last Rose awoke to the situation. Her

amused incredulity of the whole strange scene now gave way to a furious anger that he could dare so to humiliate her. That comes of permitting a priest to make love to you — you never know when the saint will conquer the mere man. And there he stood in such immaculateness, his robes gathered about him, his form drawn up as if there were contamination in her very touch. There he stood, clasping that crucifix as if the Lord on it were his own special protector. Why didn't he go and have done with it? If he was remorseful, so was she; she never wanted to see his sanctimonious face again. And there was that horrid knob-nosed pardoner looking on! How dared he! how dared he! She would reply to him, she would shame him for his cowardice, she would — What she did do was to throw herself face downward on the ground, shedding tears of exasperation and impotent rage. Annys, taking this, very naturally, for a sign of penitence, thought that his exorcism had had effect, and strode off well satisfied, leaving the pardoner to gloat over the beauty of the girl with whom he so strangely and unexpectedly found himself alone. For an instant he watched the departing figure of the young priest with jaw dropped in astonishment. Could it all have been a magnificent piece

of acting? No, it was impossible; even to such a cynic as Hugo Stott, it was evident that the man had been thoroughly in earnest. He looked at the girl and his eyes glistened. He tiptoed up to her.

"The devil or no devil, 'tis a delicate morsel. I fear not the devil, nor anything else when 'tis so well disguised."

He would have liked to bury his ugly face in her white neck, but, even as he approached her, she turned suddenly and screamed so loud that instantly a number of men rushed from the fair grounds. They could only swear roundly at the disappearing figure of the pardoner, who had lost no time in making off as quickly as his long gown and clumsy form would permit.

The sight of Rose, pale and trembling, and the obvious inference of what might have happened had they been less prompt, did not tend to make them waste any love on monks and pardoners. Little enough love wasted already!

XX

ANNYS no longer had the strength to continue on his journey into Kent. That night he spent in alternately praying upon his knees and pacing up and down in anguish of spirit. Although a child of Mediævalism, and more or less heir to the Mediæval ideas and superstitions, yet there was much within him that was in advance of his age. He could not take comfort in the current conception of the nature of woman. His dearly cherished views on the marriage of the clergy, his profound hope that the love of woman would be lifted from the base, animal view that obtained in the morbid fancy of the followers of Mani,— all went to arouse within him a trust and belief in womanhood which chafed at his contemptible action in throwing all the blame upon Rose. Often in the past had he been overwhelmed with shame as he read the cynical confessions of priest after priest and saint after saint, wherein all the weakness of the man had been laid on the oftentimes innocent shoulders of the woman. He always had had a

contempt for the horrible selfishness that could permit a saint to sin with a woman, and then in a fit of repentance mount to heaven with beatific grace while at the same instant with perfect equanimity he sees the woman sink into the awaiting fires of hell.

And then there came swiftly upon him the recollection that the practical outcome of his sudden pious exaltation had been to leave a beautiful and helpless girl at the mercy of an unscrupulous man like Stott. In that thought lay a strong agony that was not entirely spiritual. Enraged both at himself and the pardoner, he would gladly have strangled the fellow, had he but come upon him at that instant.

The slow-footed dawn came and found him worn and discouraged. He was utterly unfit to go upon his mission to Kent. The joy of helping others should be vouchsafed only to such as first can help themselves. He, forsooth, a leader of other men! No longer could he lead himself. He was but a broken reed. The calm shelter of the Abbey appealed to him with renewed insistence. He could close his eyes and instantly the chapel with its dim religious light was before him. He could see the dark, cowled figures of the monks passing in noiselessly, he could see their

bowed heads as they devoutly worshipped. The beautiful chanted responses, the sombre throb of the organ, shook him to the very soul.

So he went to Matilda and told her that he was about to ask to be taken back into the Church, in order to have a brief respite in a holy retreat.

"I have chosen to go, not to St. Edmund's, but St. Dunstan's, ten miles on.

"I am all at sea," he added pathetically, "adrift and helpless. Perhaps I have been too stiff-necked. Perhaps God hath punished me for concerning myself too much with things temporal. Perhaps after all the Church is right in that the mission on earth of the priestly office is not to make earth a better abiding-place, but so to lift up the minds of men, so to fill their hearts with thoughts of the life hereafter, that the ills of this life sink into utter insignificance."

Some of his old-time arguments against that false conception of Christianity rose to her lips in reply. The very words that he had spoken to her again and again she longed to speak, and yet a certain pride held her silent. She could not bear to have him think she was pleading for herself. Of course he could not marry her if he entered again into the Church, and yet she would not have been human had there been no comfort

in the thought that neither could he marry any other woman. For, with the quick intuition of a woman who loves, she had read the secret that was torturing him. There had been moments when she had been tempted to give him his freedom and permit him to wed her cousin. But she read his heart too profoundly to believe that he could ever look on Rose as a poor priest's wife. He was wrestling with the Evil One, and it was her part only to pray for him, which she did with all the strength and fervor of her pure soul.

He looked down on her, and he thought his heart would break within him as he realized how strongly he yearned, really yearned, to love this dear, sweet woman, and how utterly impossible it was for her frank, pure eyes to quicken one beat of his pulse. For he had learned something, and he knew now that men did not love merely with their minds and souls. He knew now that, save he loved with every drop in his veins and every nerve in his body, it was not what men called love. He took her firm, strong hand in his, and readily would he have cut his own from his arm could he have felt shoot through him the exquisite bounding of the pulses that would come even from the faintest touch of Rose's hand. What was

this marvellous emotion that comes not and goes not as a man wills it?

He saw with a tightening of his heart-strings that Matilda looked wan, as if she, too, had lost much sleep. Yes, she was very dear to him, and to see her unhappy distressed him keenly. To bid farewell to her was like bidding farewell to a part of himself, so fully had she entered into his life. Yet he, himself, had paled those cheeks and drawn those new, strange lines about her mouth. Had another man done this, gladly would he have beaten him within an inch of his life. Ah, how had he justified the noble trust which that great-hearted lad had given him? How could he ever look Richard Meryl in the face again? O that he had never entered into their lives, or at least not until they had been united. What a friend, what a sister, he had lost! A low moan broke from him and a shudder that seemed to break his frame in two.

She forgot her wrongs, and pitied him. "God speed thee, and bring thee back stronger than ever for the needed work."

"Ay, pray for me!" he said, "I need thy prayers sorely."

As he walked along the woods, and drew nearer to the Abbey, he grew more at peace with himself.

Already the touch of the holy life was upon his soul. He scarce noticed what was about him, so distinct was the picture of the Abbey walls before him. Suddenly he observed a bit of bright color. Was it some fancy of his tortured brain, or was it really Rose seated there at the foot of a tree?

She was in a mood that was complicated, even for her. After the scene with Annys on the outskirts of the Fair, she had encountered the Baron. Stung with anger and resentment against the poor priest who had so shamed her, and also struggling against a remorseful contrition at having countenanced (and more than countenanced) the love-making of Matilda's plighted lover, she welcomed the distraction of the Baron's ardent wooing. She loathed her life and her surroundings. He painted the future in roseate colors. So, even as Annys approached, she was on the point of keeping a rendezvous with the Baron, who was to carry her off with him to the castle — that great, glorious, gloomy, dread, yet fascinating castle. And yet, although her mind was fully made up, she played with an idea, as was her wont, deep down in a kind of subconscious fashion. Suppose, after all, she had fled with Annys! How his eyes had blazed! And those sensitive lips! One was tantalized into

wondering whether there trembled on them a kiss or an Ave!

After all, there would have been a certain subtle charm in being the mistress of a great and stately prelate that would be totally lacking in giving herself to one so frankly of this world as the Baron de Leaufort. Her prelate-lover might come to her straight from the preaching of a sermon on chastity; she would kiss away all recollection of it. She could see others approach him as their spiritual adviser, and watch the holy purity of his face and revel in the knowledge that at will she could sweep over it the swift pallor of desire. She was full of all sorts of whimsical pictures as she looked up suddenly and saw Annys gazing fiercely, hungrily, down at her.

“ You are ill,” she cried, startled.

“ Ill?” he answered, in a strange, hard voice, strange even to his own ears. “ Ill! Ay! ill unto death, and all the saints in heaven cannot save me.”

He buried his face in his hands for an instant, and then he looked at her and a groan escaped him.

“ Woman,” he said, “ in my foolishness I thought that love could come of heaven.”

She spoke no word, but watched him, fascinated.

"Ay, poor, ignorant fool that I was! But now do I wot right well that it cometh not out of heaven, but of hell, woman, of hell, of hell!"

"See!" he cried, grasping her suddenly by the shoulders so that she winced with pain. "See, I have sought to flee thee, I have sought to escape by every means in my power. Even now am I on my way to shut out the sight of thee in a cell at St. Dunstan's. I have prayed, and I have scourged and chastised myself—but all in vain, still it conquers me, it tortures me, this terrible power that from time immemorial hath been the snare and curse of man—the carnal love of woman."

He noticed that his grasp hurt her, but he did not care.

"I held myself," he continued, "even I, above the Holy Fathers, above the Saints, above temptation. I thought it might be given to man to love tenderly and chastely. *Tenderly! O my God! tenderly!* Listen. I love thee, but there is nothing whatever of tenderness in my love, for I warn thee it hath turned me into a foul demon. Flee me, flee me while there is yet time, flee me, for there is naught of Christ's tender, beautiful love in this. Nay, I tell thee the Fathers were right, the love of man for woman is a cursed, cursed thing."

And making the sign of the cross, he sank

upon the ground, face down, that he could no longer look upon her.

There was something in his helplessness as he lay there, that appealed to her better side, to that elemental mother-nature that lies somewhere, however deep down, in the worst woman. The swift thought to revenge herself for his humiliation of her, to keep him by her until the arrival of the Baron and then to hold him up to ridicule and scorn — was put aside as quickly as it was conceived. She would slip away noiselessly and let him forget her if he could. She would even pray that he might be able to. He looked so utterly worn and ill that her tenderness went a bit too far. With a sudden impulsive movement she bent low and laid one hand lightly upon one hollow temple. In an instant he sprang up wildly, fiercely, but she had slipped quickly behind the broad trunk of an old oak and he gazed about him stupidly. Had it all been but a wild fantasy of his overstrained brain? He had sprung up determined to clasp her in his arms. His struggle was at an end, he could fight no longer.

"For this was I crucified? Thou hast crucified me again."

The plaintive words rose and fell soft and sweet through the woods.

The figure of the Lord stood before him, and oh, how infinitely sad was the beloved countenance. Annys threw himself before Him, shaken by terrible sobs. The figure faded away. The woods were full of the cries of demons, evil faces mocked and jeered at him from the branches of the trees. The sky grew copper-hued. He fled as swiftly as his trembling limbs would carry him.

His one thought was to reach the Abbey. Already he longed to feel the sting of the lash about his shoulders.

XXI

IT had been noticed for some time past by all members of the household that the Abbot of St. Dunstan seemed ill at ease. It was even the cause of some jesting among the monks that, for the first time in the recollection of his brothers, the Abbot's appetite had failed.

And small wonder that the usually placid Abbot was disturbed at heart, for there had been rumors in the air of an intended visit from the Bishop to inquire into certain scandals that for some time past had noisily rung in his ears, in spite of their unwillingness to hear them. At last, but two days ago, a letter had been sent by messenger from the Bishop, announcing that he had been compelled to write, instead of coming in person, because, although his spirit was unfailing, his flesh was all too weak to stand the great burden of his calling. The scathing denunciations in the letter proved indeed that the prelate's "spirit was unfailing," but, severe as they were, the Abbot thanked his stars that at least he had escaped

a visit. Before dictating a proper answer to the pastoral letter, an answer that should breathe a spirit of the most complete contrition and humility, once more the abbot read it from beginning to end:—

“Thomas, by divine compassion, Bishop of Ely, for Christ’s sake — Greeting to John Wallingham, Abbot of the Abbey of St. Dunstan.

“Since we, although unworthy, are by the requirements of our office bound to render account of you and all our people before the eternal Judge ‘terrible among kings of the earth,’ we, therefore, are moved inwardly by grief of heart and pained even to the very marrow of our soul that evils so base, so loathsome, so shameful, so diabolical, so infamous, and so impious, separate you from the body of Christ and join you to the body of our ancient adversary. For the name of Christ is blasphemed by you, and the Holy Scriptures through you who by the mouth of your detestably vile body presume to teach and guide others.

“Now, though absent in body, yet present in spirit, we attempt in writing what we cannot at present accomplish by word of mouth. We admonish you that you take heed to receive this writing of ours as though it were the word of the Lord Himself with awe and humility of mind.

“Therefore we beseech you and command you: let the remembrance of your profession come to you; bring often before your eyes the sacred order to which you belong, to which is joined the vow of chastity; consider also the guidance of souls which you have undertaken, in which should be shown the example of chastity. In addition to these things, ponder, I specially entreat, over the fear of hell, and the love of celestial pleasures. Occupy yourself, I beseech you, by the crucifixion of Christ, for the future, with the importance of a holy conduct

of life, cleanse yourself of the stain of crime, and by the radiance of good deeds flee the darkness of your past life, and by the fragrance of a good reputation dispel the repulsive odors which have arisen.

"And so, with the tenderness of my inmost soul, I ask that you drink the bitter portion of this page, inasmuch as it is offered lovingly and that through it you may profit and benefit. Drink, therefore, not only willingly, but eagerly, the bitter cup of your transformation into a new man.

"Farewell in Christ, Farewell."

What could the Abbot write in reply, to convince the Bishop that a visit in person was not necessary? There was a strong probability that a smooth, repentant letter might deceive the old man; but once let his penetrating eyes fall on the Abbot himself, let him come near enough to hear the thousand and one bits of scandal that were floating about the neighborhood, and the Abbot's occupancy of the monastery was but a question of hours. Besides, the Abbot needed time to set in motion an earnest appeal to the Archbishop to relieve him of the "inquisitorial jurisdiction of the Bishop of Ely." And if that did not succeed, there still would be Rome to appeal to. Plenty of Abbeys had received this privilege, and the Abbey of St. Dunstan had grown rich and had more moneys to spend than even the powerful Bishop, who had his great estate to keep up and who could not mortgage his properties beyond

his own lifetime. The monastery of St. Dunstan had indeed thrived off the popularity of its shrine to St. Mary, to which women came who were desirous of becoming mothers. The divine afflatus had worked so many miracles upon wives who had long disappointed the hopes of their husbands, that its reputation had spread throughout the land. For a while vast content filled the breasts of the fortunate fathers, but little by little certain ugly rumors began to be whispered, and it was these that caused the Bishop's letter.

The patient scribe awaited the Abbot's pleasure. The Abbot fumed and scowled. At last,—

“Most dearly beloved Brother in Christ,” he began.

Just then a monk stood before him. “What do you want?” asked the Abbot, somewhat impatiently, since he was at last launched upon the important letter, and it would not do to put off answering it too long, or the writer might suddenly find strength to come in person. “What is it?”

“There stands before the gate a russet priest who begs admission,” spoke up the monk.

“Admit him. Why come you to me for that? I am occupied. Begone!”

“But, most revered Father, by his own admission he is under the ban of the Church.”

"Ah, so? Let me see him." And the Abbot slowly waddled to the gate, and peered through the bars. There he saw a young poor priest upon his knees.

"What do you wish?" he asked.

"I wish to be received again into the bosom of the Church."

"Do you wish it?"

"Yes, I wish and desire it."

"Your name?"

"Robert Annys."

The Abbot's eyes lit up with triumph. He knew well the story of this wilful young poor priest, who had refused high office at the hand of the Hierarchy and defied it. Perchance if he converted this notorious sinner, the Bishop might be brought to look less severely on his own past sins. The Abbot looked down upon the young man complacently. "The fellow looks meek enough now," he thought. He drew himself up, and spoke in solemn tones the words that would receive the erring one back into the bosom of the Church. Pleasanter work this, by far, and more soothing to his pride, than penning letters of contrition and obeisance.

"Receive, then," he recited, "the sign of the Cross of Jesus Christ and of Christianity, which

you have hitherto borne and which the error which had deceived you caused you to lose most miserably."

Then he swung wide the ponderous gate, saying:

"Enter into the house of God, after having departed therefrom, bewildered unhappily by error. Know you that you have been snatched from the snares which are Death and Destruction."

Annys followed the Abbot to his private chamber. The Abbot knew well the type of man before him, the exalted, morbidly self-censorious type, which would fling itself on the cold, hard ground for an entire night for the harboring of an unholy thought. He listened with benignant countenance to the tale of the penitent man, and well he believed his word that this had been his first temptation to sin. He knew, too, that this was a case that required soothing rather than harassing. This was the kind of man whose reason becomes unseated from a real agony of contrition. He laid one fat hand upon the shoulder of the young poor priest who kneeled before him, abjectly.

"How do you know, my son, that it was a woman whom you encountered in the woods on your way here, and who tempted you so sorely?"

How did he know? How could he bring him-

self to say that every nerve in his body had trembled with ecstasy in her presence?

"Yea, it was a woman, Holy Father, the most beautiful woman on the earth."

The Abbot smiled; in the course of a long experience he had heard of a good many most beautiful women on the earth.

"I know well that it bore the semblance of a woman," he went on suavely, "but how know you that it was other than an evil spirit—one of Satan's minions sent to tempt you on your way to Holy Church?"

Was it possible? Was the whole thing but a horrible vision which had been sent to mock him? Horrible! Was it, then, wholly horrible? Great God! he was undone indeed. Here he kneeled at the foot of his confessor, and, instead of the countenance of his dear Lord, the tantalizing, brilliant beauty of a woman's face was before his eyes. He was utterly lost in sin.

"O Father, most Holy Father," he cried passionately, "shrive me, shrive me! I will fast three days, not even water shall pass my lips. I will spend three whole nights on my bare knees on the ground. I will bear three thousand lashes, anything, anything. Only let the countenance of my God be turned again toward me."

"Tell me, did not the form of the woman seem to disappear miraculously when you made the sign of the cross?"

"Yes, yes, Holy Father; the ground seemed to part and swallow her up, and she disappeared from my sight utterly."

"Ah, I thought as much. Doubtless she descended into the awaiting pit of hell. I shall exorcise the Evil Spirit from you, and you shall have peace. Fear not. All will yet be well."

"A penance, a penance."

The Abbot pondered for a moment. He must name something that would appeal to the penitent as sufficient, yet he dared not permit him to undergo too severe a strain in his evidently exhausted condition. Suddenly his face lit up with an inspiration. "I have heard," he said, "of your good work among the poor. The rustics believe in you and trust you. Go to the cellarer and get bread in plenty and scatter it in great largesse among the poor people" (he could yet make the monastery bear a sweeter name before the coming of the Bishop) "and give it all in the name of the Abbey of St. Dunstan, forgetting not to deliver with it the blessing of the Holy Abbot."

But Annys implored that some real penance be given him. "Besides," he added, "I have no

longer the strength to go forth into the world. There will I meet with women. I desire and pray not to see the face of woman more."

The Abbot hid a smile. He had heard like protestations before. He had also known to come later the fervent appeals for permission to depart from the Abbey for a brief space. With the giving of such permissions the Abbot was notoriously generous.

"Well," returned the Abbot, "wait, and for the present remain here and spend the night on your knees on the floor saying four hundred Aves, and in the morning, before your fast is broken, one hundred lashes shall be laid across your back."

"One thousand, Holy Father."

"I have spoken."

Then the Abbot motioned Annys to follow him, and proceeded to the chapel, where they discovered all the members of the monastery assembled. At the entrance, Annys took the oath of fidelity and then prostrated himself while the monks chanted in unison the seven Penitential Psalms.

It would have taken a brazen sinner indeed to remain unmoved during the touching service of receiving the excommunicated one back again into the fold. Annys was deeply stirred. He

lay on the floor of the chapel, shaken by long-drawn sobs, while the exquisite modulations of the solemn chant rose and fell about him. In the dim religious light, the monks in their flowing robes, their pallid faces standing out like carved ivory against their black cowls, seemed as spectres from another world looking on the trial of a soul before the Great Judge.

How sure, how unfaltering, was the touch of Holy Church upon the penitent soul. With what fine intuition did the service bring to the soul of the evil-doer the sense of sin, and finally through the whole gamut of human emotions,—terror, faltering hope, faith, despair,—at last, through humiliation and renunciation, lift it with rapture to God.

At first the terror of the Lord's wrath is upon him:—

“O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger,
Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.
Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am withered away.”

Then a calmer note is struck, one of confession:—

“I acknowledged my sin unto thee,
And mine iniquity have I not hid.”

Then the ardent supplication, vibrating with a passionate contrition:—

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean :
Wash me and I shall be clean :
Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

* * * * *

Hide thy face from my sins,
And blot out all mine iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God."

Then creeps in the note of despair:—

"Hide not thy face from me in the day of my distress.
My heart is smitten like grass, and withered.
For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink
with weeping."

Once more the calmness of renunciation and
humility:—

"Teach me to do thy will :
For thou art my God."

At last bursting forth into the glorious anthem
of deliverance:—

"Blessed be the Lord my rock.

* * * * *

I will sing a new song unto thee, O God :
Upon a psaltery of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee."

As the last triumphant words of the refrain
slowly died away, Annys was conducted to the
altar, where he again prostrated himself, while
the Abbot offered up a special prayer for his
salvation and made the sign of the cross over
him. No longer was he under the ban of the
Church. He rested on her bosom as a wearied
child spent with sobs.

XXII

But the peace that Annys had so fondly hoped for in the monastery was farther away from him than ever. The week that followed was a daily, hourly struggle with the devil within him. With a body scarce kept alive by the scant portion of food which he permitted himself but once a day, in the hopes of conquering the awful sway of the senses, in reality he was innocently making their hold the stronger upon him.

In his wild passion for repentance his once clear vision of the follies of Manichæism left him, and he plunged into the false notion of the monastic world that passions can be killed by killing the body. The faintness caused by lack of food, the cramps in his limbs from constant kneeling, made him unable to sleep. Instead, the nights passed in a kind of waking semi-consciousness, filled with horrible dreams of beautiful women alluringly holding out their arms to him, and then, as he was about to clasp them, changing into dreadful fiends, grinning and spitting fire at

him. Or else he thought that women were pressing kisses upon his lips, and faint from the strength of his emotions, his weak body could endure no more. Enraged by the torments, he sought to escape them by castigating himself afresh. As others had done before him, so he tried to forget the existence of his body by making himself exquisitely conscious of every aching, throbbing inch of it.

The methods of monasticism were a failure in subduing the carnal nature of man. Few monks were like St. Poemen, who, when accused of thinking too much of his body, defended his right to wash his feet by declaring that he had learned to kill, not his body, but his passions.

The normal man, when the pangs of hunger assail him, eats his meal and straightway forgets all about the existence of his stomach. For a brief space—at least until the next meal is due—he may concern himself with ideals. The normal man sleeps his eight hours or so, and therefore the need for sleep does not overshadow the hours that he chooses to devote to the work of the Lord. The ascetic who spends his day with back bent and knees pressing the hard ground of a cell, who tries to limit his sleep to four hours and that upon a bare board, and whose diet con-

sists of dry bread and muddy water, is on the fair road to be conquered by that which he fondly thinks he is conquering.

On the seventh night, while his staring, burning eyes looked into the darkness, Annys suddenly became aware of a light of peculiar softness and purity, which appearing particularly bright at a certain spot opposite, filled the entire cell with its beautiful radiance.

He raised himself partially from the board on which he lay, and watched curiously the spot where the light shone brightest. It was not long before he made out the lines of a man robed in the impressive vestments of a Pope, the superb jewelled tiara upon his head.

There was something in the dark, glittering eyes, the haughty mien, the compelling magnetism of the figure that in some mysterious manner made him certain that Gregory the Seventh, the great, indomitable Hildebrand, stood before him.

"Art thou one Robert Annys, poor priest, who departed from Holy Church and went about among the poor stirring up sedition and insurrection?" he asked.

"Nay, Most Holy Father, I am that one Robert Annys who went about from village to village

teaching of ‘Christ and him crucified.’ If I sinned, I sinned only in following too closely the example of Christ, which is the one unpardonable sin of the Church Hierarchical.”

The Pope’s face darkened, and then a slight smile crept into it. “Hot-headed, and fearless e’en as they told me,” he exclaimed. Then he regarded him severely. “Blaspheme not! Art thou he who would boldly proclaim that the marriage of the clergy is not an unholy thing?”

Annys groaned for answer, “Ay, I am he.”

“Look, Robert Annys, then, I cannot find it in my heart to cast thee wholly from Grace, and I may yet intercede for thee, because thou art such as err through too great enthusiasm. Tell me concerning these ideas of marriage. Let me hear all from thee, that I misjudge thee not.”

“Most Holy Father, I thought that religion should lie in every act of man and not alone in breviaries and masses. I sought to create a priesthood that would understand the people and enter into their lives and needs. And we shall never have that, O Holy Father, until the priests share the people’s joys and sorrows. The heart of the priest must beat at the same sight that thrills the heart of the peasant; the smiles of the priest must spring from the same source that gladdens the

humblest breast; the tears of the priest must flow from the same anguish that wrings the heart of the lowliest one."

The haughty prelate listened patiently while the young poor priest spoke.

"Ah, my son," he said at last, seeing him pause, "such a vision takes a high hope of Man and a firm belief in his purity of heart. I fear thy faith would not be justified. It takes account of the priest lifting up the average man, but it takes none whatever of the average man drawing down the priest."

Annys opened his lips to speak, but Hildebrand waved one hand to command silence and continued: "Now, my son, in the course of thy wanderings, doubtless thou didst encounter women such as thou hast been fond of describing, who would, through their great purity and perfect sympathy and unselfishness, make the ideal spouse for the priest. Tell me of such women, do they exist?"

"They exist," cried Annys, vehemently, and then his voice failed him. He could not bring himself to speak of Matilda.

The eyes of the Pope blazed. "Ha! I thought as much," he murmured.

Then at last, reluctantly, Annys brought him-

self to speak of Matilda, her simple charity, her ready self-sacrifice, her tender sympathy and unfailing helpfulness.

"And of course, were Rome to give thee permission to take a wife, it would be this same gentle, helpful, ideal spouse thou wouldest choose?"

Hildebrand watched the face of Annys keenly.

But Annys covered his face with his hands.

A bitter smile crossed the Pope's face. "How? could it be that one could hesitate before all this perfection?"

"Ah, torture me no longer," burst out Annys. "I will confess all."

"No need," answered the Pope, coldly. "I know all. I have followed thy career with a great compassion in my heart. Dost still think that did the Church permit the marriage of the priests, they would all take unto themselves Matildas? Ah, Robert Annys, see how utterly thou didst fall from Grace! I tell thee, thy religion would be one only for saints, but the Holy Catholic Church takes cognizance of the weak and sinful."

Annys strove to reply, but his voice failed him. Then it seemed to him that the figure of the Pope disappeared with a loud noise, and there came the sound of heavy blows upon the door of his cell;

he tried to rise and go to the door, but he fell back unconscious.

When he opened his eyes, it was to look into the gentle face of the Bishop of Ely bending solicitously over him.

XXIII

It was indeed the Bishop of Ely who had ordered the door of the cell broken down, and had rescued Annys from what would doubtless have been his last fainting spell. He had succeeded so well in subduing his flesh that at last it was on the point of separating itself entirely from the spirit. The Bishop brought him to with difficulty, and sent him to the infirmary to be nursed back to strength. He did not return to Ely until he saw the tinge of health returning slowly to the young priest's sunken cheeks.

Thomas of Ely had conquered his own weakness of flesh after all, and had taken the journey to the Abbey of St. Dunstan before the wily Abbot had time to receive his answer from the Archbishop. He had dealt summarily with Abbot John and deposed him, refusing to listen to his plea for mercy; for nothing outraged the Bishop so keenly as that a servant of Holy Church should betray his sacred trust. He would have liked to appoint Robert Annys as the Abbot's successor;

but as that was utterly impossible for the present, he appointed a most worthy monk who was the unanimous choice of his brethren.

Little by little Robert's strength returned, and his kind adviser led him gently back to the thought that he could again be of use to others. Therein, the Bishop knew, lay the only balm to the tortured heart. He gave a hint to the new Abbot, who gave Annys work to do in the scriptorium, where he could dwell in the calm past, and await the time when he could again venture forth into the world — a world that sorely needed his guiding hand. When he was allowed to leave the infirmary, it was not to go to his solitary cell, but to share the dormitory with the others.

The days and the weeks slipped gently on, the routine of life in the scriptorium endearing itself more and more to the newcomer's heart. The scriptorium at St. Dunstan's was a large chamber which usually held about a dozen persons, but which at times permitted of as many as twenty working together. The Abbot selected the scribes, no one being allowed to enter the room without his permission. It was also the duty of the Abbot to give orders to the Armarius how to portion out the work, a certain task once assigned, no monk being permitted to exchange his portion for an-

other. Boys and novices wrote letters, while older monks were selected to make copies of old books and transcripts of such chronicles as required rigid accuracy. One was specially selected to insert rubrics and design ornamental capitals and other embellishments, while there was a chief artist to whom were left the important designs. The Armarius bound the books in wooden covers to preserve the parchment from mildew and damp. He was really the librarian, keeping a record of all books loaned either to the monks for private study (although he never permitted the rare works to leave the scriptorium), or to sick monks in the infirmary. Every volume had to be returned before the lights were lit, and work ceased in the scriptorium the instant the daylight failed. The manuscripts were too precious to be endangered by artificial light, nor indeed by any kind of heat, so in winter the monks had to work by the hour with their fingers benumbed by the cold. The scribes had no light task. Penned on the margin of an exquisitely written manuscript, there has come down to us from those days at least one pathetic plaint:—

“He who does not know how to write imagines it to be no labor; but though three fingers only hold the pen, the whole body grows weary.”

Robert Annys often watched with interest the busy Armarius, who had manifold duties. He kept a careful record of the use of every book; and at times some distant monastery begged for the loan of a certain book, and some proper guarantee must first be secured; or perhaps, if the borrower were not well-known, a book of equal value must first be deposited as ample security. Besides this, it was his duty to provide on the shelves the material for the work: plenty of parchment, ink made of soot or sometimes of ivory black, pens fashioned of the quills of geese or peacocks, chalk, pumice stones, penknives to cut the parchment, awls to make the lines, rulers and plummet to note omissions of text in the margin, and weights to keep down the vellum.

Not only Annys grew to love his work and to take a great pride in it, but the absolute silence of the scriptorium soothed his shattered nerves. He felt that he could not be in surroundings more congenial. The monks stepped in and out noiselessly. If a book was required, it was necessary only to extend the hand and make a movement as if turning over the leaves of a book. If it were a missal that was required, one should make the sign of a cross; if the gospels, the sign of the cross on the forehead; if a tract, one hand

was laid on the abdomen, the other on the mouth; if a pagan work, first the general sign for a book, and then one scratched the ear with the hand after the manner of a dog—for what was a pagan save an infidel dog? The only time the silence was permitted to be broken was when a large number of copies of some popular treatise was required, in which case a skilful transcriber read aloud while the others copied at dictation. The works of Tertullian were given Annys to copy. Although at a distance, the Bishop yet watched over him, giving strict orders that no lives of the saints, or confessions, or any work of religious exaltation be given to him. His purpose was to bring Annys back to the world and the present by other channels,—to keep his mind on the calm scholarly days at Balliol, rather than to permit it to dwell upon the immediate past.

“The sweet yoke of the Lord”—how often had Annys come across that phrase in the confessions and meditations of holy men. And now for the first time he really understood the full sweetness of it. Its spell was slowly working upon him, subtly undermining his resolution to return to the people. At last the day came when he thought his work lay within the walls of the Abbey. There was no one there to tell

him his old self was not dead, but slumbering. As soon as he had signified his intention to take the vows of their order, he had been intrusted to the special care of an old monk who spoke to him from time to time of the discomforts and humiliations which a monk must be prepared to bear. At the end of two months he was ready to listen to the reading of the Rule of St. Benedict, a voluminous document of seventy-three chapters. At its conclusion, the reader admonished him solemnly :—

“Behold the law under which thou wouldest fight : if thou canst observe it, enter ; if thou canst not, depart in freedom.”

When June came, this ordeal had been gone through but once ; it would be put to him three more times during the twelvemonth to follow, and at the expiration of this period he would be warned that shortly he would have no power of leaving. Then, if he still kept to his resolution of becoming a Benedictine, he would be introduced into the oratory and there, in the presence of all the community, before God and all the saints, would have to promise stability and perpetual residence, and also reformation of his morals and obedience under pain of eternal damnation. He would then make a declaration of

this pledge in writing with his own hand, and place it upon the altar; then he must throw himself at the feet of each of the brethren singly, begging them to pray for him. From that day forth he would be regarded as a member of the community.

XXIV

WHEN the note reached Matilda, telling of his decision to become a Benedictine monk, and imploring her to forget him and to wed Richard Meryl, who was far worthier of her than he, her tears flowed, not at her own loss, for that she had long since schooled herself to bear, but at the people's loss in their leader.

Robert Annys, her Robert Annys, a Benedictine! Impossible! How often in the sweet days of their companionship had he railed bitterly against those so-called Christians that buried their noses in ponderous tomes of *Meditations on the Future Life*, while Satan grimly did his work on the life going on about him. How his impatience had flashed out against those that shut their eyes to Christ's true mission in the world, and continued in the even tenor of their way within the sheltered cloister, while without the cold north winds blew, and crops failed, and sheep died by the hundred, and gaunt men looked into each other's eyes and saw there, not hope

and good-fellowship, but only hunger and despair and a thirst for vengeance. What answer would such have ready—he used to say—at the Tribunal of the Great Judge, when asked after the workers of the world? Would their answers differ any from that made by baron or bailiff, the same miserable palliation that trembled on the lips of guilty Cain?

Robert Annys, her Robert Annys, a Benedictine! He who had always translated religion into helpfulness, had he, then, after all, lowered his colors and aligned himself with the good but impotent dreamers of the earth? Now she regretted that her pride had let him go from her without one plea for Piers. That would not have been a plea for herself. And perhaps she could have saved him this defeat. Yet she comforted herself with the thought that it could not last. Some day—she hoped before he would take the vows of his order—some day, amid the peace and calm of the cloisters, the voice of the down-trodden people, his once-beloved, ever-beloved people, would reach him, and he would fling off the cowl, to place himself again at their head.

For indeed their need of him was great. As the time drew near for the march on to Blackheath, it was impossible to restrain their impa-

tience. Everywhere slumbered fires that needed but a puff to burst into instant flame. Here it was a quarrel of long standing with an abbey for the right to grind one's own corn; there it was the insolence of a poll-tax collector; again it was a bailiff seeking a runaway serf: any pretext served to fan the smouldering embers. Matilda was too loyal a pupil of Robert Annys not to watch anxiously the constantly increasing outbursts of violence. She knew how much depended on the orderliness and self-control of those who were to demand their freedom of their King.

During these days she prayed much, and pored for long hours at a time over her Bible. Whatever unhappiness her love for Robert Annys had caused her, at least it had brought her the joy of reading for herself in the Wonderful Book. It was everything to her, her one beloved companion, for now she lived utterly alone. Her grandmother was no more. When Rose went from her, she became a helpless paralytic, only speaking a minute before her death, when she uttered some wild curses in which two generations of de Leauforts — uncle and nephew — were strangely blended. Meryl had not yet returned from his mission. Matilda lived in a blessed companion-

ship with her Saviour, sharing in every act of His life, letting every precious word that had fallen from His lips sink deeply into her heart. It was a marvellous experience, which broadened and developed her receptive nature. She burned with a passionate desire to make His Presence real to those about her. She resolved to take up that part of Robert's work — the bringing of the Gospel to the people. There could be no greater service on earth, and there was comfort in the consciousness of continuing *his* work. She was sure the people needed no other guidance than the Bible in their hands. For what knew the untutored peasant girl of history, of the slow, painful steps by which Christianity was won for the world? of the contamination in the very forces that it conquered? She knew only the beautiful simplicity of Christ's mandates, and felt a growing horror for the intricacies of ritualistic worship. What knew she of Donations of Constantine, of the slow, steady growth of the temporal dominions of the Papacy? She filled her heart to overflowing with His words of peace and charity, and gazed with growing scorn at the bickerings and warfare waged by the Head of Holy Church.

She knew that in Rome there stood the Church of St. Peter's. It had twenty-nine steps leading

up to its doors. When you go up or down, if you say a prayer, you shall have seven years' pardon for every step. Inside there are seven principal altars. At each of these you can obtain seven years' pardon. At the high altar pardon is given for twenty years. If you time your visit between Maunday and Lammas, you obtain fourteen thousand years' pardon. What could this all mean to her? What knew she of the need to encourage pilgrimages to Rome, to fasten the eyes of the world upon it? What knew she of the magnificent statesmanship that could hold the Holy City in the imagination of all — believer and pagan alike — glorious, impregnable, supreme?

She knew only that Jesus granted absolution through much suffering and great faith, a real change of heart. A small detail which, in the calculation of the shrewd Pope, had been relegated to comparative unimportance.

So, in the same way, she looked about her on the condition of the serfs, and saw nothing of the slow upbuilding of the feudal system, of the service that once had meaning, but only the apostolic equality of all men and the nobility of labor.

All men were created in the image of God, and she wanted to see all men free and equal. Nevertheless, she had a horror of violence. She was

fearful of the spectre of the wild beast that stalked ever behind the noble purposes of the Uprising.

Once she encountered some men riotously returning from the sacking of the house of the collector of the latest poll-tax. Some staggered under the weight of the valuables which they had carried off, while others staggered under the strong wines which they had poured down their throats. Her quick indignation was aroused.

"Thieves! Robbers! Despoilers! How can ye so bring disgrace on the Great Society!"

But the leader only laughed, and called out in his thickened voice:—

"Nonsense, girl! A poll-tax collector—'tis no thievery, my dear, but a putting back into our own pockets what he did take from ours." And they passed on, laughing and hiccoughing.

Another time she came across a crowd hanging on the words of an evil-faced man, who was urging them to attack a neighboring castle.

"It will not be the only castle to fall before us," he boasted.

It disheartened her to see this fellow seeking his own ends under the pretence of the common good.

"How long since was it that Sir John dismissed you as a dishonest bailiff?" she cried. And the

fellow turned purple and then took to his heels, followed by the jeers of the crowd. She did what she could, but she realized that it was but little. How long before Robert Annys would return to them? How long?

One day Richard Meryl came back. He approached the village at a moment when a large crowd had gathered about one who was holding forth on the ever popular text of Adam and Eve.

“‘Adam delved and Eve span,’” the fellow was saying. “So ho! where, then, was our great gentleman? Where, then, was our fine Lord looking down from his costly manor-house upon his men sweating and toiling in the fields? And where was the fine lady lolling at her ease, wrapped in dainty raiments fashioned by the hand of others? *If Eve span not she went naked, and if her lord delved not he went hungry.* And now tell me, if the good God saw fit to make the world in the first place only of workers and no laggards, who, then, brought the laggards into the world?”

“The Devil, the Devil, the Evil One,” shouted several. Then cries came from all sides, while the speaker’s face glowed with satisfaction:—

“Put them out!”

"Burn them out!"

"Starve them out!"

Just then Meryl recognized Matilda, standing among the others, pale as death, but with a great light flaming in her eyes. He left off watching the speaker and glued his hungry eyes upon her face. He saw with a sinking heart how thin and haggard it was, and a vague terror stole over him. He had schooled himself all this time to bear the sight of her happiness, and now he saw that he must begin all over again to bear the sight of her misery.

The man's strident voice swept on: "By God! men of Cambridgeshire, when every manor-house lieth in ashes the Lords will no longer refuse to grant us our quit-rents. Then shall we be able to till a bit of land in freedom and we shall grind our corn where we will, and there shall be no masters to own us body and soul."

"Stay!"

It was Matilda. The people turned, amazed at her boldness.

"How foolishly thou dost rant, Peter Wells!" she said in a clear, steady voice that all marvelled at. "Wot ye not, neighbors, that even Piers Ploughman tells us we must have overlords and rulers? Wot ye not that when the rats and

mice desired to put to death all the cats in the realm that one wise rat spake and said:—

“‘ If we have no cats over us, sure all the rats will eat one another! ’

“ Now, what good will ever come of violence and bloodshed? Oh, surely, ye are of little faith, for if ye believed in the justice of your Cause ye would be satisfied to stand before the kind King with no weapons in your hands save just rightwiseness. Ye would not put your trust in burning and sacking and pillaging. Oh, shame, shame upon you ! ”

There were some that seemed impressed by the girl’s words, but Peter shrugged his shoulders roughly. “ Bah ! spoken like thy soft-hearted poor priest, Robert Annys. He was forever bidding us wait. *Wait!* and for what ? ” he blazed out furiously — “ for another poll-tax to be wrung from the poor while the rich hide their treasure between the folds of the Justices’ gowns ? Wait ? for what ? For more laws to be passed making it a crime to seek honest labor ? for more raping of our women ? Nay, let thy Robert Annys face me, and I shall tell him we have waited too long already.”

Her head drooped. Ah, if he would but face them !

“ Where is Robert Annys ? Why is he not here

to help us?" queried one, impatiently. Matilda trembled and swayed as if she would fall, and the shadows darkened under her glowing eyes. Meryl watched her closely.

"Why does he not come back to us?" repeated the voice. "Where does he tarry so long?"

It would never do to let these wild men suspect the truth. She nerved herself to answer.

"Did ye not yourselves send him on a dangerous mission into Kent?" she asked. There was something unfamiliar in her voice that puzzled Meryl.

"It is long since time that he returned," muttered the fellow, and Matilda broke out with a sudden impatience: "Mayhap he is risking his life even now for us while ye stand idly talking. Learn to obey, bide ye in patience, for it lacks not many days before the word will be spoken and then ye may go forth as honest men."

Then Meryl approached her and drew her aside, and, as she recognized him, she fell sobbing into his arms.

He conducted her home, and then he asked the meaning of it all.

"Thou art unhappy. Tell me what has happened. And where is Robert Annys?"

"Said I not already that he was in Kent?" she whispered.

"Nay," he said impatiently, "thy face is far too dear to me to permit it to deceive."

As she did not reply to this, he gazed at her in gloomy silence for a while, and then spoke with a certain stern deliberateness.

"He is not in Kent."

She quivered. "How should I know more than I have said?" she asked plaintively.

"'How should I know,'" he mocked; "I left thee on the eve of wedding Robert Annys. Art thou his wife?"

"Nay!"

"Art thou betrothed?"

"Nay!"

"What? not even betrothed?" Then in a low, trembling voice, "Has he wronged thee?"

"Oh, Richard, for shame! for shame!"

"When did he go away?"

"The second day of the Stourbridge Fair."

"And thou hast not seen him since?" he asked in amazement.

"Nay, I have not seen him since."

He paced up and down a few times, and then he came back to her and looked down on her, sullen, uncertain, not knowing what to think. "Listen!" at last he broke out, "I return and find thee unhappy. He must have caused this.

Tell me the truth and the whole truth, or I shall seek him if it be to the end of the earth, and I shall wring the truth from him if it has to be from his dying lips. Dost understand?"

She understood. But before she would speak, she made him promise solemnly not to reveal his whereabouts. It was a promise given most reluctantly, nevertheless she felt certain it would not be broken.

He received the news with amazement and incredulity just as she had done. Impossible! Robert Annys a Benedictine? Impossible! "What is it that thou art keeping from me? What drove him to this?"

He paced up and down in deep thought. Suddenly he stood before her again and asked abruptly, "Where is Rose?"

In a few words she told him of Rose's flight and the death of her grandmother.

"When did Rose go?"

"The second day of the Stourbridge Fair," she said.

Meryl's face darkened. "How? the very day he went? What is this that thou art telling me?"

The blood leapt to her cheeks, she looked up into his stormy eyes, protesting, denying — she

scarce knew what—"Nay, nay, Richard! How canst thou? Believe me, thou art quite wrong—She"—but the long strain of the past months had worn on her and her self-control was at an end. She fled into the house, weeping bitterly, while he left in a turmoil, angry, sore at heart.

During the next few days, he deeply regretted his promise. He saw the growing rebellion against the harsh landlordism of the monastery; he knew but a word would send dozens of the men rioting at the gates. It was easy to predict what would happen if he led them there and then cried out that their former leader was within, a deserter, caring naught for them and their woes, concerning himself solely with Aves and Breviaries. Ah, he would not stay behind, either! His blood leapt at the thought of breaking down the doors with the maddened men at his heels, of beating his way through the surging crowd, of dragging Annys from his cell and flinging him, with all the guilt of his miserable soul upon him, straight to the judgment seat. He had guessed something of the truth. He knew the nature of Rose Westel, he knew also that it must have taken some tremendous upheaval to send Robert Annys knocking at St. Dunstan's. But there was no pity in his heart for the struggle which his friend must have

waged, nothing but a blind rage against the man who had broken Matilda's heart.

He had no patience to bide at home. He joined a party of desperate men who were setting out for Ely on a wild errand. His mood had entirely changed. He derived a certain fierce satisfaction in rousing the people to immediate action, in stirring them to commit deeds of violence—in short, to do all that Robert Annys would have deplored. It was the only way there was left to fight him—he had not chosen the weapons, it was all that was left him.

Soon among all the men of the Bury there was not one more reckless, more feared, than he.

XXV

ROBERT ANNYS had been at the Abbey of St. Dunstan for six months only, and he was still going through his novitiate, when he received the signal distinction of being appointed the chronicler of the Abbey. It was a position of great trust, and never before in the history of the monastery had it been given to a mere novitiate. To Annys there was a profound inspiration in taking up a task that had been handed down from generation to generation through an unbroken line of chroniclers of whom the Abbey was justly proud. Well he knew that the world owed a great debt to those patient, industrious monks in every land, who faithfully set down the doings of those that lived in the world. Surely if it had been left to those that spent their lives in the midst of the fray, it had never been done—not alone from lack of time, but from lack of clerky knowledge as well. Right glad he was to take up the task done by that Gildas who had painted in fiery colors the misery of the Britons when the Romans

departed; by the venerable Bede, father of Catholic history; by Ingulphus, Abbot of Croyland; by William of Malmesbury, "the Great Chronicler," fountain-head of English history, chronicler of the monastery of Malmesbury, who grew so to love his work that he refused to give it up to become Abbot of the monastery.

The great book into which the Chronicle of St. Dunstan was entered was treated with the greatest possible veneration. It lay in a conspicuous place in the scriptorium, and no one but the chronicler was permitted to make entries in it. When any great piece of news was brought to the monastery that seemed worth recording, the person giving the information wrote out his version of the story on a loose piece of parchment and slipped his communication into the book of annals for the authorized compiler to make use of in any way that seemed best to him after due examination of the evidence.

There came a day in June, a wonderful day when Nature put forth at once all her attractions in one burst of rapture after the long, hard winter. The garden in the close was one mass of brilliant color, and the air was overpoweringly languorous with the sweet fragrance. Annys went to his daily task reluctantly, so ardently did Nature woo

him to remain outdoors. As he stood for a moment hesitating on the threshold of the scriptorium, the words of the poet Chaucer came to him:—

“ Whan that the month of May
Is comen, and that I hear the foules sing,
And that the flowres ginnen for to spring,
Farwell my booke, and my devotion.”

He smiled to find how perfectly the poet had expressed his own mood. He seldom found in Chaucer's joyous, buoyant nature a note that appealed to him so intimately as did the voice of the sombre wanderer among the Malvern Hills. At last he turned his back resolutely upon the picture of loveliness and entered the scriptorium. The scene that greeted his eyes was a busy one, and yet one of great charm. Not one black-robed form that was not earnestly engaged in work of some kind; here one bending closely over some old Latin text that had been destroyed almost beyond recognition; there one deftly engaged in cutting great sheets of vellum; over in a corner an artist holding his hand poised in uncertainty over several pots of color; near him was one sharpening a quill; another patiently awaited his turn for some longed-for volume; and yet two more were carefully copying a score of music with

large notes, that the beginners in the choir could easily read it. Work, and no shirking of it, yet an atmosphere of perfect peace and content, for it was work done in joy, and therefore lifted to the realm of Art.

Oh, the wonderful, indescribable peace! How far off were the turmoil, the doubt, the responsibility, the unjoyful, incessant toil, the infinite woe, the weary burden of the world. Even as the pioneer monks had built their monasteries always in some hidden vale protected by high hills from the north winds that their crops might flourish, so their lives were protected from all contact with the great currents of action that swept by outside. The storm-centres of protest and unrest, the whirlwinds of revolt—all passed over and around the walls of the monastery, unknown, unfelt, unsuggested.

Robert Annys owed much to the Abbey of St. Dunstan. He had been as a helpless mariner in the fierce grip of a storm. He had been swept by tumultuous waves, his ears had been deafened by the awful voices of the warring elements, and suddenly he had drifted into a sheltered harbor, and the same winds that had beaten furiously upon him, here but peacefully rocked his bark upon the quiet waters.

Poor fool! before he had sought a haven here,

how the woe of the world had weighed upon him! How foolish he had been to feel a personal responsibility in the actions of Divine Providence! There were some mortals who acted as if all the wrongs on earth were to be righted between sunrise and sunset. He had been one of those. How faintly the echoes of his past existence came to him here.

He opened the ponderous volume. He had been thinking the day before, when the daylight had faded and he had reluctantly left his work, of a new and charming device for an initial letter H, which he had been about to trace. It was to be something quite novel in the way of decoration, and he expected to receive great approbation for it. His fingers hovered in some uncertainty over the brushes before he could make up his mind which one was the very finest. Then, having made the auspicious selection, it remained for him to choose between a paint of brilliant scarlet or one with the depth of the sun-warmed strawberry in it. Finally he chose the brilliant scarlet. As he bent over the page, he noticed for the first time a slip of paper which had evidently been placed between the pages of the Chronicle during his absence.

“The outbreak of the rustics at the Bury is terrorizing the true and loyal men of the realm,” it began. “On Saturday last,

under the leadership of one Richard Meryl, the unruly mob attacked the abbey and plundered it, taking away a rich cross, chalices of gold, and many jewels, to the amount of a thousand pounds, and did much mischief to the buildings.

"The prior, Sir John de Cambridge, fled, under cover of darkness, hoping to reach Ely. But the following day the mob discovered him in the woods near Newmarket. They conducted him to Newmarket, where, all night long, they did most blasphemously mock him; kneeling before him, they cried, 'Hail Master!' and striking him with their hands, they cried, 'Prophesy who smote thee!'

"At break of day, the rioters led their victim back to Mildenhall, where they were joined by many people from the Bury. Here they held a council by which the prior was condemned to instant execution. After allowing him the privilege of confession, his head was severed from his body at a single blow. The excited rabble cried, 'See the traitor's head!' 'Happy the day that sees our wish accomplished!'

"Thus they came and went as masters, those who once had been slaves of the lowest order."

The room swam about him for an instant. He was obliged to clutch the high desk upon which the folio rested to save himself from falling. He looked at the indifferent backs of the monks bending over their work; a great fury came over him, and he longed to strike and beat them, that they could so placidly pore over their books, while this thing was going on outside. Before his agitation was noticed, he had recovered sufficiently to ask permission to leave the scriptorium and seek the air in the close.

XXVI

THE great Uprising had come. The world stood utterly aghast at the spectacle of the plain rustics throwing down the plough and shouldering the axe against their rightful lords and masters. The bravest warriors shrank affrighted before the poorly accoutred insurgents, for the terror of a new Idea was upon them. What was this strange force that was turning upside down the recognized laws of society? Behind the rusty, cracked weapons of the mob stalked the spectre of a coming Democracy. No wonder that the most hardened warriors quailed at the thought of fighting an intangible foe. No wonder that the most skilful captains lost their heads and stood agape.

Ah, where was that orderly assembly of which Annys had so fondly dreamed? That assembly of fifty thousand strong gathering together from all parts of the realm to appear in all loyalty and obedience before their King?

In the close he paced up and down in feverish excitement. The moment toward which for so

long his eyes had been strained had at last arrived. Without him the people were assembling and marching on to seek the King and have their wrongs redressed. Without him—yes, and without his restraining touch. What he had dreaded, then, had happened—the wild beast which had slumbered for so long within the breasts of the rustics was now awake and growling forth its rage. The forces of greed and revenge, of hatred and envy, were unloosed upon society, and no one apparently had the power to chain them again.

“Behold, we are honest men”—he had dreamed they would say—“working and travailing from dawn to sunset, and with but little in our stomachs and less on our backs. Thus do we labor, valued at less than our master’s sheep, and hardly as much as his swine. Yet, nevertheless, are we men created in the divine image of God, as Holy Writ tells us, men even like unto you, O King, alike born and buried and taken up into immortality or cast down into the pit of hell. We are judged, not by the extent of our possessions by the Great Judge of the Universe, but by that which lieth in our hearts. We want, O King, to be free men. We ask that there be no further serfs in all England. Let all work be free and

willing and it will be the better for us all—for our masters as well as for us."

Was there no one in all the broad land to restrain the people from violence and tell them that they were ruining their own cause? No one? A voice whispered within him that there had been one, but he had deserted the cause and withdrawn himself into a monastery, and was more concerned with the doings of the Past, alack! than the moulding of the Future.

Yet surely he could not be the only one. He shrank from realizing to the full the consequences of his own action. And Richard! Hot-headed, misguided Richard at the head! It was terrible!

He must know the worst. Perhaps the accounts had been exaggerated. Perhaps there was yet worse to come. In any case, as chronicler, it was his duty to discover by what means the news had been brought. He inquired of a brother, and learned that the news had been brought from the Bury by a messenger who had lingered and insisted upon having audience with the chronicler.

"With me? Some one seeks audience with me?" he asked uneasily.

He paced up and down restlessly while the other went to conduct the messenger to him.

Who could it be? he had cut himself so completely from the world and its affairs.

He was amazed to recognize in the messenger young Robert Shepherd, whom he had known at the Bury.

"Tell me," he began eagerly, "you are from the Bury. Is it so bad, then? The Uprising has begun?"

"Begun? Ah, of a truth begun! There is no ending it now, save the whole land lie at our feet!"

"But how comes it that Robert Shepherd brings the news, written by one clearly against us?"

The lad reddened. "It was safer not to refuse the monk's request," he said, "and it did no harm to the Cause. Let the monks rant as they will. We have wrung the freedom of the town from them. They were all in a panic. Besides," he added, "I bear with me also another message of very different complexion."

But of this Annys took no heed. "Tell me," he urged, "Richard Meryl, my friend, he was there, a leader among them — what of him?"

"Ah, do not ask me," faltered Shepherd. "It is too terrible."

Annys grasped one of the pillars for support.

"What, Richard! hurt? dead? quick, what has happened?"

"Yea, he is dead," answered the lad, solemnly.

For an instant Annys swayed. He placed one hand on his heart, and closed his eyes. The other looked at him anxiously.

"Tell me all!" ordered Annys, hoarsely.

"It was terrible, yet it was fine too. He exposed himself recklessly, and was caught, and they offered his freedom, if he would but persuade his followers to give back the charters to the monks, and disperse in orderly fashion to their homes."

"Ah! and he?"

"They led him, the next day, bound securely, to the market place, where he addressed the men. Some of them looked up at him sullenly, and they murmured threateningly, for they had been told that he had purchased his life with their defeat.

"But he fooled them all, for he stood there looking proudly down upon them, with the sky no bluer than his eyes, and his fair hair curled as a little child's low over his brow and neck. Ah, I tell you an Ave rose to my lips—for I never once doubted him—as I saw him standing there, so brave, so glorious—"

"Ah, I wist well how glorious!" groaned Annys, brokenly.

“And no sooner was there silence than he cried out clearly so that all could hear :—

“‘Fellows! Take no thought for my trouble, for if I die, I shall die for the cause of Freedom which we have won, counting myself happy to end my life by such a martyrdom. Do, then, to-day as ye would have done, had I been killed yesterday.’”

“My brave Richard! And then?”

“And then an axe crashed through his skull. But his murderers did not live long enough to gloat over their work.”

“Richard, my brother! That I had died for thee!”

The lad was deeply affected by his own recital. He remained silent an instant and then said suddenly:—

“But I waste precious time. I bear an urgent message from Matilda that you should go at once to Ely.”

“To Ely? I? Wherfore?”

“Her message I committed to memory, word for word: ‘It is too late to do aught at the Bury, but fly to Ely, that the people can be saved from grave danger.’”

“How knows she this?”

“Her cousin Rose sent to her from Ely, from the Castle.”

"Rose at the Castle?"

"Knew you not she has long been the Baron's favorite?"

"My God! I cannot go there!"

"But it must be. Her message to Matilda ran that no one but Robert Annys could save the people."

"Ah, that I could save them!" His head drooped. "Alas, alas, I have forfeited that right. They would not listen to a monk. They would spurn me."

"Nay, trust Matilda for that. Until this day I thought—and all thought—Robert Annys was in Kent."

"How can that be?" he asked, bewildered. "She knew where I was."

"Aye, but she always hoped you would come back to us, and kept your place ready for you. 'Tis only to place yourself again at our head!"

Annys was stirred to the depths at this revelation of Matilda's devotion. Ah, this was the true heart he had wounded, the love he had turned from!

"Well, God grant thee right!" he said. "I pray so."

"Here is a minstrel's garb and badge," said Shepherd, "sent by Rose to gain admission un-

questioned to the Castle, for the gentles are greatly incensed against all poor priests, at whose door they do lay all the mischief. The Baron is engaged in securing minstrels from all over England for his great feast. Approach as one of those."

"A feast? Wherefore gives he a feast, just at this time?"

"In honor of his bride who—"

"His bride? I thought—and what of Rose?" stammered Annys.

"Oh, Rose Westel will get lovers a plenty while men walk the earth who have two eyes in their head."

"Peace, peace, enough, fellow!"

"Will you go to Ely Castle?"

"Go? You say I can save the people from grave danger. Then all the abbots in Christendom could not hold me!"

And as he crossed the stone walk of the cloister, he walked with a firmer tread and held his head higher than at any time since he had entered the Abbey of St. Dunstan.

XXVII

SHEPHERD had spoken truly. The powerful Baron de Leaufort had wedded the sister of the great French Count Henri de Harfleur. The match had been arranged solely by the efforts of the wily Legate, who had whispered of the charms and worldly goods of the Countess Flavie, in the hopes of further cementing the union between the Church and the English Baronage. The serfs might recover their reason and the Barons once again might look with envious eyes upon the Treasury of the Church. It would do no harm to wed de Leaufort to an ardent Catholic such as the Countess had long since proved herself to be.

This was the motive that brought the Cardinal Barsini to Ely Castle, but on seeing Rose Westel, he speedily discovered a new incentive to succeed in his mission. He went so far as to add a couple of thousand lires out of his own pocket to the dowry of the Countess when he saw that the Baron bit none too greedily at the bait. It never

entered his mind that he could possibly fail to find favor in the eyes of Rose Westel, since he had not been accustomed to encounter opposition where he chose to distribute his favors. But from the instant that Rose caught sight of the smooth, complacent face of the Nuncio, and noted the quick leap in his eyes as they dwelt on her, it seemed as if an icy hand had suddenly clutched at her heart. Something told her that her happiness was at an end. And she had been so happy, ecstatically happy. She had grown to love de Leaufort with that kind of love which would have stayed with her had he not possessed a groat in the world. Gladly would she have followed him to the wars and endured any hardships so that she might remain by his side. There were times when she longed ardently that he might meet with reverses so she might prove to him how unselfish was her devotion; she feared that the very ease of her life cheapened her love for him in his eyes—made it more a matter of mere circumstance than it really was.

One day the Legate had graciously taken her into his confidence, and told her of his plans both for the future of the Baron and for herself. She had shrunk from him and fled to her lover, pant-

ing and weeping and raving and acting precisely as she would not have done had the terrible shock left one grain of reason in her head.

It was after this scene with her that the Legate had seen fit to increase the dowry of the Countess.

When the Baron returned with his bride, she was accompanied by a gay retinue, and the Castle was splendidly decorated in her honor with great streamers and banners thrown out from floor to floor, and the finest of tapestries and yards and yards of cloth of gold hung on the walls of the chambers. Watchers had been set in the highest tower so that the party might not arrive unannounced, and on the very first sign of their approach, the Baron's sister, accompanied by a party of guests, descended the terrace to greet them. At first but a tiny speck of color could be made out, creeping along the furthest line of poplars that fringed the river as it drowsily turned and twisted upon itself, a slender thread of sunlight far off in the distant fens. A woman, faint and sick with watching and weeping, peered from the slit in the tower, and fastened her eyes on that speck of color which broadened at every turn, and slowly resolved itself into many colors, and at last into the separate forms of people on

horseback — so that she could distinguish one from the other, so that her restless, searching eyes could make out the Countess to be a frail-looking woman whose tight-fitting riding-habit revealed every line of her slender, elegant form. She was glad to see that her expressionless face was rendered yet more so by the foolish reigning fashion of plucking the hair from the eyebrows in order to heighten the forehead.

Far, far down at her feet, from below the drawbridge, a bit of blue flashed up at her. She shivered, for she knew it was the moat onto which her mother in her despair had flung herself from the lower parapet. The retinue came nearer, she could see that there were several chaplains and ladies in waiting among them, but no one was so noble looking as the Baron in a tight-fitting coat-hardy of crimson with green shoulder pieces, and wearing a beautiful crimson cap with a square top and a rosette of gold in the centre.

For some time after the arrival of the party, there was a great stir about the Castle, for the Countess had brought many gifts which had to be unpacked and arranged in their proper places. There were great oaken chests containing priestly vestments for the chaplains, of cloth of gold, of cerulean tissue embroidered all over with images

of the Trinity and the Blessed Virgin, and an altar-cloth for the chapel, of white velvet embroidered with a representation of the Salutation of the Blessed Virgin, and also for the chapel a chalice, paten, censer, alms-dish, bowls, chandeliers, an exquisite vase for the holy water, a group of little silver bells for the Mass, everything of the very choicest and finest. Then there was a great bed-cover and curtains of Tripoli silk wrought with dragons in combat, the deep border embroidered with a vine pattern, the whole powdered with bezants of gold. And there were tapestries for two receiving rooms, of which one was embroidered with popinjays in worsted and the other with roses and other flowers in silks. Also the Countess brought a handsome salt-cellar of silver gilt with quaint carvings, and studded with rare jewels, for the great table, and there were gowns of scarlet and azure and purple velvets embroidered and powdered over with small pearls, and there were double cloaks, hoods, and mantles for riding, besides saddles for herself and her chamber-women, and her bridal dress, which required careful handling, for it was of great magnificence, of cloth of gold tissue, with a mantle and kirtle to correspond.

To do fitting honor to his bride, de Leaufort

had long since made preparations on a vast scale for a great banquet, sparing no pains to make it the finest and rarest that had ever been held in those parts. It was well to do honor to his French bride, and also it was doubly well to give some notion to the King of his great resources, for there were times when even Kings had to be duly impressed with the power of their Barons ; and it was well also for the insolent peasants, who were creating disturbances here and there, to be a bit overawed by a great show of wealth and state.

For some weeks in advance he had caused messages to be carried all over the land offering liberal pay to all the minstrels who would come to the Castle with their instruments, so that when all were finally gathered together there were over two hundred minstrels, with their harps, their psalteries, their rotes and rebecks, their gitternes, cymbals, and tabors.

The land was scoured for all possible delicacies ; messengers were sent in hot haste to the coast to secure fresh fish and fetch it back on fast horses so that it would arrive untainted by the rays of the hot sun. Great pasties were made and filled with partridges and quails, with skylarks and thrushes ; and there were jellies that quivered

mountain-high in every possible hue ; while stags, huge loins of beef, swans, peacocks, and capons were delivered at the door of the kitchen in an unending stream.

The Countess made herself exceedingly unpopular by insisting for some days after her arrival on partaking of her meals in private,—she with the Baron and her own party and the Legate and only one or two others in the private chamber, the solar of the Castle. She insisted upon it that the most refined of the aristocracy were doing away with the eating of dinners in the great Hall, which she considered extremely vulgar. To this whim of his bride de Leaufort gave way very reluctantly, for well he knew the storm that would be raised about his ears at this departure from the established custom, which had been good enough for his uncle and his uncle's father and grandfather, and as far back as the line extended. For the dinner in the great Hall was one of the chief institutions about which centred the social life of feudal days. Here the highest nobility and the plain folk might meet under one roof as the members of one great family. The most ill-mannered clout, who could not eat his meat without dripping the gravy all over his chin and down upon his breast, could learn daintiness and skill from the

gentles who could deftly use their fingers without a single drop falling where it should not. Those into whose lives beauty and grace entered all too seldom could feast their eyes upon the most beautiful ladies in the land, their ears upon the most beautiful music of the day, and their grosser senses upon the best of wine and food,— all at the expense of their lord, whose hospitality was never questioned. Surely, if it came about that the quality withdrew themselves into chambers shut off from the rest of the house, all the music and song and merriment would leave the great Hall, and if it were no longer used for feasts and merry-making, who knew how long before the goodly habit of spreading rushes on the floor for the night might also be given up, and the lonely traveller be forced to seek quarters in some foul and filthy inn, where the fleas would see to it that he rose on the morrow more eagerly than he lay himself down at night.

So at least for this banquet, the Baron was determined to have his own way and cling to the good old customs, save that he set the time much later than the usual noon hour, that the feast could last well on into the night,— an unwonted dissipation that would make the occasion all the more memorable.

Two hours before sunset the blare of the trumpets summoned the guests, who gathered together in the great Court and then entered the Hall two by two, and made their way along the rows of tables set the length of the Hall. At these tables stood a crowd of lesser guests and retainers who watched the guests of honor proceed to the upper end of the room, and mount the steps which led to the carpeted dais upon which stood the splendid high table of carved oak, now covered completely with a cloth of fringed and embroidered white silk strewn with aromatic herbs.

First came the Baron Edmond de Leaufort, his under short coat of white, elaborately embroidered in gold, with a long mantle of royal blue velvet reaching to his toes, and falling over his shoulders into a great train, which, if measured, would have come to three yards in length and more than a dozen yards in width. The hood and the entire length and breadth of the mantle were edged with gold, upon which were embroidered flowers of blue with leaves of green. The wide, loose sleeves, lined in a silk of delicate rose color, hung down from the elbows in a long point which just escaped the ground. The hosen, which fit so snugly about his calves as to necessitate a sewing on at each wearing, were of differ-

ent colors, one of brilliant scarlet, and the other of white, while the long pointed shoes were of scarlet. His hair, curled low over his neck and ears, rested on a stiff ruff of fine white lace studded with pearls, while over his breast hung a long golden chain of finest workmanship, almost touching the links of yet another chain of like sort which was worn as a girdle low about his waist. The Countess by his side was gowned in a kirtle of scarlet cendal, laced close to the body, over which fell in graceful folds a mantle of rich green velvet, edged with an intricate pattern outlined in seed pearls. The sleeves of the kirtle were as tight as the hosen of the Baron, and necessitated on each robing the same manœuvres with thread and needle. About her hair (which had been freshly washed in wine to give it the fashionable gloss) was wound a gorget of finest white linen striped with wires of gold, which, after being turned two or three times about the neck and fastened by a great quantity of pins, had been raised on each side of the face until it resembled two great horns—a fashion which certainly gave a threatening aspect to the fair and elegant ladies of the day.

All the guests of both sexes were arrayed in their most sumptuous robes to do honor to the

feast; yet perhaps in the breast of some of them was a certain chagrin that it was not the cold season, so that they might have displayed their rare and costly ermines, the pride and joy of the aristocracy. Notwithstanding the absence of furs, which perhaps were the costliest of all articles of apparel, there yet was enough gold spent on the backs of the nobles assembled there to have clothed in russet cloth the whole of England.

On the procession moved with stately grace to the accompaniment of the instruments above in the oriole, the great folk smiling and chatting among themselves, while the others looked on in silence. One there was, a wild-eyed man, tall and lank, in a priest's cassock, who looked on while the procession passed him, in silence it is true, yet his face speaking a language more eloquent than that of the tongue, with a look of contempt and hate and bitter scorn. Notwithstanding this, it was not very long before this same fellow seemed to have utterly forgot his indignation in his satisfaction over the dainty food that was placed before him.

While the trumpets blew a triumphant fan-fare the guests seated themselves at the high table so that their faces were turned toward those below, the great ewers of chased gold and silver were passed by lackeys who kneeled before them, fol-

lowed by others bearing napkins of dainty linen, grace was said by the elegant, courtly Legate, and the guests were paired off by twos to eat from the same trenchers and to drink from the same jewelled goblets. At last the servitors marched in triumphantly bearing the elaborately decorated dishes high up over their heads that all might see and applaud. As the feast proceeded with great merriment, the going down of the sun slowly cast the vast chamber into gloom. At a word from the host, the great candelabra of gold carven into all sorts of odd designs were borne in with the tall waxen candles all alight, and set along the table. Along the lower end of the Hall tall powerful fellows held flaming torches in their hands for the illumination of the lesser tables which bore no costly candelabra, and at the same time for the comfort of the lackeys ranged along the wall dealing out wine from the huge casks that were being rolled into the Hall in a steady procession.

As one by one these flambeau-bearers took their places, flinging, as they moved, irregular spots of light into the gathering darkness, there stole in among the many minstrels gathered high up in the oriole overhead, one who bore little resemblance to his comrades. It was a face one would expect to find bowing low before the altar,

or elevating the host, not singing the ribald songs that often enlivened the feasts of the great. But as the fellow wore conspicuously upon his shoulder the badge of the Baron's minstrels, no further heed was taken of him by them than to sit closer together, that he could get a view of what was going on below.

XXVIII

THE newcomer up in the oriole looked down upon the scene before him as if bewildered by the weird sight. Every now and then he buried his face in his hands as if to shut out the picture, and then suddenly raised it again to stare wildly, while his lips moved constantly as if in prayer. The vast height of the great groined roof left the whole upper portion of the Hall in darkness, with here and there a bit of carving thrown out into sudden relief by a flickering torch uplifted in the arms of one below. Here some fierce dragon flung itself from the gloom, and as suddenly retreated; there some monstrous carved face grinned for an instant and fell back; a griffin claw struck at the blackness and was itself overcome; the deep recesses in the mullioned windows were the home of grawsome mysteries. The great table on the raised dais was brilliantly illuminated in spots where the tall gold candelabra stood. The centrepiece stood out clearly, a swan in full plumage, its beak gilded, its body sil-

vered, resting on a mass of brown pastry painted green to represent a field of grass. Eight banners of rose-colored silk surrounded this *pièce de résistance* and a cloth of the same covered the mound upon which it was placed, so that it towered high above all the other dishes. Along the table shone great golden goblets with wide-open lids studded with gleaming jewels, silver and gold salt-cellars of strange designs, and the nef, a great ship of gold, enamelled with dragons, on four golden wheels, containing spices and sweetmeats. Also there were, rare sight indeed, forks of gilded silver with exquisitely wrought handles, a gift from the Countess looked upon with small favor by the conservative Baron.

Between the tiny spots of light, amid the glitter of gold and silver, gleamed the rich colors of the costumes, crimson and peacock and emerald, cendals of delicate blue and royal purple, and the sparkle of rare jewels. The light fell here and there on the face of some bearded noble or gentle lady, while immediately above these, from the tapestry wall, showed proud peacocks, clusters of flowers, or scenes from the chase. Over the head of de Leaufort hung the arms of his house, while it chanced that just above the Legate snarled the hideous fangs of a wolf standing at bay.

As the trembling Dante gazed awestruck down into the pit of Hell, so Annys—for the newcomer was he—thinking of the great Florentine, looked down from the oriole on the scene of revelry before him. A light song floated down from the minstrels, silencing the gay chatter, and turning upwards the faces of all. Among them flashed for an instant the one face that stood between Annys and the Grace of God—the most beautiful face in all England, and now the saddest as well.

“Sumer is icumen in,
 Thude sing cuccu ;
 Groweth seed, and bloweth mead,
 And springeth the wod nu,
 Sing cuccu !”

Then followed the chorus :—

“Cuccu, cuccu, well singse thu, cuccu,
 Ne cease thu never nu.
 Sing cuccu, nu, sing, cuccu,
 Sing cuccu, sing cuccu nu !

Next came a quaint request from a sturdy throat which delighted especially those at the lower tables :—

“Brynge us home good ale, sir, brynge us home good ale.
 And for our der lady love, brynge us home good ale.

Brynge us home no beff, sir, for that ys full of bonys,
 But brynge us home good ale inowgh, for I love wyle that.

Brynge us home no mutton, sir, for that ys togh and lene,
 Brynge us home no veal, sir, for that will not due—
 But brynge us home good ale inogh to drynke by the fyr."

These verses done with, a bold spirit from Oxford arose at one of the lower tables and launched forth the famous students' drinking song—a parody on the Latin hymn "Alleluia."

It came as a not unapt reply to the request of the thirsty soul:—

" You will see
 The ale will make us sing
 Alleluia !

All of us
 If the ale is as it should be,
 A wonderful thing
 Res Miranda !

Drink of it when you hold the jug ;
 'Tis a most proper thing
 For it is a good long way from sun to star
 Sol de Stella !
 Drink well ! Drink deep !
 It will flow for you from the tun ever clear
 Semper Clara !"

"Beasts," thought Annys, "can they then make a jest of the most sacred hymns? Is there no

sense of shame among them all that they laugh so immoderately?"

Small wonder that, looking down upon them, the thought of Hell came to him. Surely among them all was no thought of Heaven or Grace, or Pity or Fellowship. Here were all the appetites, Hunger and Lust, and Envy together with Frivolity, Extravagance and Luxury. No thought here for the outer world, for poor Piers diking and delving in the fields. A godless lot they were, covered with unnecessary clothing, filling themselves with unnecessary food — each sense fed to overflowing with rare odors, rare tastes, rare sights, rare sounds. Surely minions of the evil one, these, blithely clutching at their insolent joys at whatever shameful cost to those less fortunate.

High up in the centre of the vast roof opened the louvre through which the smoke curled when the great logs on the andirons in the centre of the floor were lighted. Through it Annys looked up and saw the quiet stars shining down. High Heaven looked on, nor sent a bolt crashing down upon them all!

Suddenly a face struck at him from a dark corner, which was momentarily illuminated by a passing torch. It was the haggard face of the priest who had sneered as the procession passed

by. Now the fellow was engaged in cramming his food down his throat most voraciously, taking his wine in great gulps, and smacking his lips over it in a most disgusting manner. His hands trembled with eagerness, and when the lackey bore away his horn cup to replenish it, his burning eyes followed the fellow and never let him out of their sight until his fingers closed again about the cup. Annys could not help giving forth a slight sound like a groan, for the shock was a great one, since this eager glutton beneath him, this churl, who had apparently no thought above his plate and his stomach, was — would to God there were room for doubt! — none other than Will Langland, his revered poet; Will Langland, the passionate pleader for the rights of the workers in the fields; Will Langland, hater of hypocrites, reviler of lying priests, lover of justice and truth, worshipper of Honest Toil, sitting here at the Baron's feast a worthless sycophant.

Oh, something had gone awry with the world. There was no more faith or honor in the land. Independence, sturdiness of character, honesty — all an idle dream! His heart within him seemed of a sudden to burst. A black pall came over his sight, a great fury and rage seized upon him; he was scarcely longer master of himself; he

longed to shout some ringing, defiant refrain, some song of the people.

But he controlled himself with a great effort. He had come there because his people needed him. He must not jeopardize the Cause by revealing his identity. So he made his way from the oriole, down the winding stairs, out into the night, a stifled sob on his lips.

XXIX

WHEN Annys approached the Castle the following morning, he learned that the Baron had gone to one of his manors lying on the highroad to Sudbury, which was the direct way to the Mile End. Hearing of the growing boldness of the insurgents, and having some of his costliest purchases from the Stourbridge Fair yet stored within the Manor House, he thought it well to bring them to the well-protected Castle.

On the terrace Annys hid himself behind an abutment of a tower, and peered out cautiously every now and then to see if any one came by who could get word for him to Rose. As he waited there came along Will Langland, no longer the glutton of the night before, but of a sad and dejected mien, as if his conscience lay none too easy within his breast.

"Ah, Robert Annys!" he exclaimed, as he recognized the poor priest whom he had encountered several times in the past. "How comes it I find you not with our new masters of England? What brings a poor priest within the

Baron's domains? 'Tis enough to make thy head cease acquaintance with thy neck."

"Better die of an honest twist of the neck, and have done with it, than from a heart that breaks within and slowly wastes the blood drop by drop," cried Annys, bitterly, turning away his face. He could not bear it that this man should be his long-idolized Will Langland.

The poet looked at him long and silently out of his deep-seated, piercing eyes. The lines about his mouth deepened; it was evident that the man's soul wept within him. At last he spoke.

"Ay! if one did but die of a broken heart. Ah, you would not see Will Langland alive were it so. If it only were vouchsafed one to die. But alas, when only the heart is dead, we live on and on, and play the fool to our clod of clay."

Annys regarded him impatiently. "Little looked you yestere'en as one whose heart was broken. You seemed not unjoyful sitting a beggar at my Lord Baron's table."

A queer look came into Langland's face. "Nay, not as a beggar," he interposed softly, "not as a beggar. I keep my Lord's chantry in London which he did erect for the soul of his mother. I came but for the feast. I return to London to-morrow."

"Then worse than beggar, thou," broke out Annys, indignantly. "Thou, Will Langland, a chantry priest, chanting and mumbling some Latin words for thy belly's hunger! For do you aught else for the good of the land? Do you feed the poor, or clothe them? Are you serving Christ if you but mouth some words over the empty pates of the gentry so that they have leave to go and lie as they will ever after? Can this be he who wrote: —

"‘Faith without deeds is as dead as a door-tree?’?"

Langland quivered as if he had received a blow. "Ah, wot I well what kind of a man that Will Langland, singer of Piers, should be. Stay! If it tortures you to see in the gluttonous, servile chantry priest of yestere'en the poet whom you honored, doth it not hurt more, ay! a thousand-fold more, that very Will Langland? Think you there is one word that these hands have writ that does not rise up and mock at me? Think you it is a light thing to be thus crucified, as it were, by one's own flesh and blood?"

"Surely," he went on, after an instant's pause, during which he looked sadly away, far into the distant horizon, as if his own words had stirred many recollections within him, "surely I can

be no more hateful in thy sight than in mine own. Do I not daily curse this weak, lust-loving clod of flesh that holdeth prisoner a mind that at least once dreamed noble dreams? Ah, Robert Annys, thou wouldest weep water fast enough with both eyes didst know one tenth part of the unruth of him who walks the earth as Will Langland."

And he was about to go, when Annys cried: "Hold! who am I, indeed, that I should judge thee? Well wot I how oft the deed fits ill with the creed. But stay, canst get a word to one Rose Westel in the Castle? But a hint of my presence, and she will come, as she awaits me." Langland readily promised to return to the Castle and give her the message, and Annys again sought his hiding-place.

He did not have long to wait before Rose approached. Before he came forward to meet her, he observed the Legate walking swiftly after her, so he remained hidden. When Rose saw that she was being followed, she gave a little gasp of surprise. "I thought you had gone with my Lord," she said to the Cardinal Legate.

His eyes gloated over her beauty as he replied. "Thou knowest, little one, I could not find it in my heart to leave thee."

"Oh, can you never let me be?" she moaned.

"So ho, my fine lady! So ho, still scornful even after thy lover has tired of thee and left his beautiful Rose with her petals falling about her on the ground, for him who chooses to pick them up and enjoy their fragrance?" He folded his arms and looked down upon her, smiling maliciously.

"Then not for you, not for you, Pierre Barsini, shall they lie there," she answered angrily, stamping her foot; "why do you follow me about and torture me so? What have I done to you that you should so gloat over my misery? Can you not let me be since I am unhappy enough to suit even you?"

A sardonic smile shot across the Cardinal's face. "Done to me," he repeated, "what have you done to me? Oh, nothing,—nothing,—only awakened within me the fires of Hell, robbed me of my sleep and all desire for food, made my waking moments a torture, and my nights a tantalus of entrancing visions, changed me one instant into a drivelling idiot,—and the next into a cruel demon with no mercy whatever in my heart. Why seek to make me hate thee? Be mine, and I shall provide for thee a state which you, in England, know naught of. In Rome you will be a very princess. Basta! I could almost laugh to think

of the Cardinal Barsini begging for a woman's favors."

The girl smiled to think that there was a time, not so very long ago, when such talk might have had weight with her.

He misinterpreted the smile. "Be not so cruel," he said, reaching forth his arms. But she sprang back with horror in her face.

"Sooner than give myself to thee," she cried vehemently, "I would cheerfully seek out the lowliest churl who slinks on his foul litter."

The haughty Legate paled with rage; for an instant he regarded in stony silence the beautiful girl who dared to defy him so insolently, then, drawing himself up to his full height, with one arm raised high above his head, as a last resort to compel her to his will, he launched forth the awful words of excommunication from the Church.

But now Annys could stand it no longer. Dashing from his hiding-place, and facing the Legate, trembling with fierce indignation, he cried:—

"'Cast out from the body of the Church, doomed to everlasting hell-fire, torture without end.' It is you, you foul fiend in holy garb, and not this woman, that should be cast out."

The Legate smiled, a cold, hard smile, fully

master of himself again. "Pardon me, Sir Knight," he remarked with studied politeness, "had I known that the lady had decided already to comfort herself with another gallant, I should not have presumed to press my suit."

"You liar, you craven-hearted liar," exclaimed Annys, hotly.

"Well, then, if I mistake, for your language is not of the choicest,—and so I marvel at the lady's favor shown you,—what is it that brings the most holy monk from his monastery masquerading in minstrel's garb?"

Then Annys became aware of his minstrel's badge still clinging to his shoulder. Hastily tearing it off, he retorted scornfully:—

"Masquerade indeed! By Mary in Heaven, I know not why the words do not choke thee in thy throat. *I* masquerade forsooth! And does he not masquerade rather who dares to wear the holy garb of a priest of God and uses the most solemn offices of Holy Church to serve his own base purposes? It is thou who art masquerading and in a priest's frock. Go, get thee a suit of flaming scarlet, and let thy cloven foot and thy long tail show honestly, and then, and then only, shall I not accuse thee of masquerading."

The Legate's eyes blazed with fury. "Think

not that I do not know you, Robert Annys, for well do I now remember that lying, sedition-loving tongue. I shall have the hue and cry set after you. I shall accuse you of coming here and seeking to set the insurgents against the Baron. You shall yet be quartered and strung for this day's work." And he swept by.

"Quick, quick," cried Rose, "he is a dangerous enemy. Meet me down by the river and tie a bit of white about the willow bush that hides thee. Await me there. Lose not an instant."

XXX

SOME hours elapsed before Rose Westel could escape unnoticed to the hiding-place by the river. As Annys stepped forth, Rose's heart sank within her, for his face was set and hard. Could she accomplish her purpose? Was this unbending monk the passionate lover she had once known?

"I was sent for," he began coldly, "in the name of my people, or I should not have come. Delay me not, there is much work to be done."

"I will be brief," she said guardedly. "They are about to attack the Manor House where the Baron has gone. I tried to keep him here, I told him his life was in danger, but he only laughed at me for my pains."

A swift gleam of indignation shot over his drawn face.

"Hast sent then for me to save thy lover, *for me?*" he demanded.

"Nay, I have sent for thee to save my soul," she said, with a pitiful ghost of her old smile, her old spirit.

"It is not given a priest of God to shrive an unrepentant harlot," was his impetuous answer.

"You are even as other priests, who speak ever by rote," flashed from her angrily. "An unrepentant harlot, if you will, but a better woman than that haughty, self-willed girl the world called 'good.' I fled from the sight of suffering in others, I cared only for my own pleasures, for no one save myself. Now go about the Castle and ask of Rose Westel, discover what kind of name she bears, count the friends who love her and whom she serves, fit the deeds she does with the selfish aloofness of that girl I was, and tell me which was the better woman. Ay, look at me, look at me," she ended passionately, "is it not written on my face?"

He looked gravely down upon her. Ah, not lightly had she loved, either! Love indeed had given her a soul.

"Yes, the heart is a great teacher," he said softly.

"It is not possible that the good Father can cast one to hell whose sole sin was in overmuch loving," she said.

"Whose sole sin was in overmuch loving." How often had he prayed that might be so.

"No," she repeated, with a certain sad dig-

nity, "I have not sent for you because I sinned through love, but because I sinned through hate."

"Through hate? How?"

She pressed two trembling fingers on her burning eyelids for an instant, and then kneeled before him and looked up piteously into his hardened face.

"I never knew that one could suffer as I suffered when that woman came—that woman to lie where I have lain, to kiss where I have kissed—that woman—ah!—I was wild—out of my senses when I sought John Kyrkeby and whispered to him that I was forced by the Baron."

He was about to speak, but she silenced him with a gesture. "It was a lie, a base lie," she said, reddening with shame; "but heed not that. John Kyrkeby left me hot with anger to stir up his fellows against the Baron."

"Ah, girl," he said sadly, "think not your words will be answerable for what follows. The people have more—far more against the Baron de Leaufort than the undoing of one maid. He has been a hard taskmaster, and has ever refused the quit-rent."

"The very words John Kyrkeby spake when I went again to him wild at my own deed. He said to me then that no one could prevent the

men from marching on the Manor save that Robert Annys would come before them again as their leader. He alone could keep their eyes fixed on Blackheath.

"I was mad, mad," she continued, now walking up and down in agony, "mad, mad. I thought only that she would not have him. I forgot that he—Edmond—must suffer. They will kill him, they will burn the Manor House over his head."

"I cannot find it in my heart to blame thee for bringing me in hopes to save thy lover," he said gently, "yet I should not have come had the message read, 'My lover needs thee,'—remember it was, 'Thy people need thee!'"

She clung to his gown.

"Nay, then, thy people do need thee. Think, will it help the people's Cause that they come to the King with hands reddened in the blood of his nobles? Remember, de Leaufort is a kinsman of the King."

"True, true," he said, "I will go, not to save thy lover. I go, but to save the people—if I can—from themselves. I cannot promise thee I shall be in time, but if word of mine can serve, there shall be no further violence."

Holding his cross high up over his head, he

gazed at it an instant outlined against the flaming sun, and took a quick step forward.

"In Thy name! In Thy name! I go! I go!"

But she detained him yet an instant. Throwing herself once more before him, she bent her head low to his sandals.

"Pray for me, pray for me. To-morrow my mother's death-bed shall be mine. Remember in thy prayers poor Rose Westel."

At first he looked down upon her wildly, as if in his eagerness to go he had forgot her very existence. He heard only her prayer for remembrance. A fierce reproach swept into his eyes.

"Remember thee in my prayers? Woman, the one prayer I have known since first I set eyes on thee has been that I might forget thee!"

And with his face into the sunset he was gone.

XXXI

FOR a while he swept on oblivious of fatigue and faintness from lack of food. The one definite thought in his mind was that he was needed, there was work for him to do. The success of the great Uprising was endangered, and he was on his way to turn failure into victory. He would bring the men back to reason, he would show them how much depended upon it that they come before the King with clean hands.

For the first time in many months the old elixir of leadership ran through his veins. He was a man, a worker, once more. The dreamer, the monk, the scholar were gone—swallowed up in a wave of disgust for the life of the past few months. Of what use had he been to the world? With infinite toil he had copied a few words from the Past. What had he done for the unborn Future? Always with eyes and ears turned backward, he had been like those unfortunates on whom Dante had looked with such horror, who had their faces turned toward their reins. It

seemed a strange whim that he could have delighted in the calm shelter of the Abbey; he now regarded it with detestation—it was the false peace against which his master, John Wyclif, had warned him. He was again breasting the stormy currents of life. The call of his people had come to him, and he was on his way to them. His long sleep was over. He was awake now. They needed him. He would save them.

"I am coming," he tried to shout, but he was voiceless, and suddenly his knees sank under him and he fell heavily to the ground.

For a long time he lay on the ground unconscious. As consciousness slowly and painfully came back to him, he looked about him wildly, and tried to recall what had happened. He was lying among the fens before the Cathedral. He was chilled through with the ooze of the swamp soaking up through the long grasses which were crushed beneath him where he had fallen. He found it impossible to rise. The land lay wrapped in the silence of evening. He could hear only the voices of frogs unceasingly ringing like sleigh bells, an occasional sobbing sigh of the wind as it touched the line of rushes, and the sucking of the water into the grasses as he stirred.

A terrible sense of some task to be done oppressed him. What was it? For a long time he gazed dumbly up at the sullen steely clouds that were driving across the heavens with a powerful rush and swirl. A damp sea fog was coming in from the ocean, and only now and then could he see the outlines of the Cathedral, looming up grimly against the horizon, cold and dark and forbidding, as some great monster looking down in triumph on his helplessness.

Of a sudden there were lights moving in the distance where lay the highroad to Sudbury. They moved about restlessly as if borne on the shoulders of moving men. Sometimes they halted, and sometimes they grouped themselves in twos and threes, and again they moved on rhythmically in regular unison. Hoarse cries and orders came to him in muffled tones, and at last he could make out that some people were singing, and by listening intently, he could just make out the words:—

“With right and with might
With skill and with will ;
Let might help right,
And skill go before will
And right before might
So goeth our mill aright.”

God! he understood.

The refrain carried him back, oh, so long ago, when he had kneeled before the altar of yonder Minster, and the stirring words had come to him as a message from God. How full of strength and vigor was he then!

Those flashing lights in the distance meant that the men were already forming, and on their way to the Manor. They would set fire to it, doubtless, and they would deal roughly with the Baron; it was all too likely that they would kill him. And what would the King have to say to the murderers of the great Baron de Leaufort? Oh, they must be saved from committing this terrible folly. Of course they would be saved. Was he not on his way now to save them? He would hold them in control; he would make them con well their own song, that right must go before might. He would march with them and not leave them again until they stood before the King, and he as spokesman would approach and say:—

“O King Richard, we are leal men and not traitors, as we have been falsely called. These men but seek to be free men, and to have the love of life and the life of love which should be all men’s, be he king or caitiff.”

He would do this.

He made another attempt to rise, but sank back again among the grasses.

“Oh, my God, my God, wherefore hast Thou forsaken me?”

The full bitterness of his helplessness rushed over him. A clod of clay!—forsooth, he was less than a clod of clay. He was of less use to the world than the smallest blade of grass, or the tiniest drop of dew. He could do nothing. He had to lie there and watch those lights disappear, and though his heart and his mind and his soul went with them, his body must remain there, prone among the bogs. What a failure he had made of his life. The one crucial call had come for him, and he could not answer “Adsum.”

“By their fruits ye shall know them.”

What fruit had he to show? He was as a tree that had fallen by the wayside, uprooted, worthless. It was because of late he had been swallowed up in the thought of personal salvation—the monastic idea, which, after all, was but a sublimated selfishness. And how came it that he, of all others, should have fallen into the fatal error of killing his body instead of preserving it for noble ends? His life at the Abbey had not conquered his body, it had permitted his body to

conquer him. The weaker the body, the stronger its sway. He looked back on his days of youthful strength, when he had contemplated with disgust the unkempt, wild-eyed hermits with their locks matted thick about their temples, when they appeared in their dirty rags along the highway, begging alms to keep body and soul together. How he had scorned the false ideals of those hermits who dared to call themselves the truest Christians. And how much better had he done with his own life? Wrecked it, wrecked it high and dry on the barren rocks of monasticism.

“ My beloved Master hath called, and I have failed Him,” he cried out again and again in his despair.

Ely Minster had withdrawn itself entirely into the night, but to one so familiar with its contour as Annys, it was easy to carve it out from the surrounding darkness; to him it still dominated the landscape as at high noon. He recalled the defiance which he had launched at it as he had stood before it in the November gloaming.

“ Be not over triumphant, even now,” he murmured; “ thou art doomed to bow thy haughty head in this land of stalwart men.”

Perhaps it was not yet too late to redeem himself. Surely that great God who had put the

breath of life into his nostrils could at will fill his loins with strength. Perhaps he had succumbed too readily. He would have faith.

"I would seek unto God," Job's prayer rose to his lips, "and unto God would I commit my cause, which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number."

The wind that had stirred lazily through the reeds now suddenly freshened. Gathering strength, at last it whipped the fog before it, scurrying across the land. As it parted the white veil before the cathedral, the moon was just peeping above the roof. As it sailed over the octagon it left Ely Minster below, carven out of the impenetrable night — etched against the brightening sky, it stood out grimmer, gloomier, than ever.

As the moon climbed the heavens, the beams rested on the rugged pile. Little by little its frown was smoothed out, a tremor swept over it, and it smiled. No longer fearsome, no longer wrapped in gloom, it appeared in the soft radiance, a celestial vision. The arcades of pointed arches, the exquisite stone parapet, the pinnacled turrets of the divine octagon, the noble towers, all stood forth in their fairylike delicacy of detail, and yet in all the simple majesty of the complete creation.

His heart beat tumultuously. The spectacle seemed to him too beautiful for the eyes of man to behold. To him there was a desecration — a sacrilegiousness — in his presence there as this glorious being bared her full loveliness to her lover night.

Then there came a voice into the wind — the voice that had appeared unto Isaiah of old : —

“Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee and not cast thee away ; fear not, for I am with thee ; be not dismayed, for I am thy God ; I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

XXXII

THE men pressed on through the night wearilessly. In the hearts of all was the joy of living a moment which had lit up the horizon for two-score years and more. Of a large body of men some there were whose throats craved the rare wines that were stored in my lord's cellars, whose stomachs hungered for the grain of the well-filled garner-houses, whose fingers longed for the contents of the great oaken chests, bursting with precious stuffs. Yet the large majority of them scorned such base motives. These were idealists, throwing away the small advantage of the moment for the greater advantage of the morrow. Many, strong in the faith of their leaders, had flung hand from the plough which at least had kept starvation from their bodies. Surely the moon looking down that night witnessed a strange sight—a deeply significant, portentous sight—the laborers, ill clad, with the marks of their toil yet upon them, armed only with cracked bows, broken swords, rusty staves, axes, scythes, whips, and even

stout sticks, going forth fearlessly to meet trained armies. And the moon, looking down that night, found not only the highroad between Ely and Sudbury alive with marching men, but also the highroad that lay between Canterbury and Mile End, and that between Peterborough and St. Alban's, and that which led from Lincoln to Huntington, and the one from Southampton to Maidstone. From the north, from the east, and from the south, wherever the moon turned its face, the roads were black with the men, for the signal had been given, and the great Uprising had begun.

On the way, small wonder that some bodies of men, grown sullen by the long wait, broke the bounds their leaders would have put upon them, and satisfied their private enmities. Some set fire to all the homes of lawyers that they came upon, for too long had the lawyers lived off the slavery of the people; others cut off the heads of all the clerks they encountered, because the land was lumbered with them; others attacked monasteries and burned the records, that their bondage could not be proven to the future, doing their work so thoroughly as to toss on the flaming pile every book and bit of writing they could lay their hands on; still more waylaid teachers of

grammar, and made them take great oaths that they would henceforth cease teaching youngsters to read and write,—for what was the good of clerkliness save to gain a mysterious and unjust power over the workers of the fields?

The great god Demos, after centuries of dreamless sleep, throwing off his sluggishness with effort, only partially articulate as yet, staggering on awkwardly, aimlessly, blindly,—drunk with the sudden revelation of his own huge strength, a tragic picture enough with his great heart reaching out toward some Ideal, but not quite knowing what it was, nor how to get it. When at last this great monster, in the shape of ten thousand laborers on the banks of the Thames, was to appear before the King—what was the welcome that would be tendered? Demos was politely informed by a noble earl that he was not costumed fitly to meet the King. The giant, tamed by the very insolence and unexpectedness of the weapon used, the one weapon perchance before which he would have quailed—acknowledged a temporary defeat. Not dressed to appear before the King! And who, forsooth, had made the laws that poor men may not go abroad save in russet cloth? Why had they not made that answer?

When the men of Cambridgeshire reached the

Manor of the Baron de Leaufort, he awoke and sent his bailiff down to them. The bailiff was a man who trusted in the stability of the feudal structure of society as few trust in the permanence of heaven.

"What would ye," he cried; "wot ye no better than to disturb his Lordship at this time o' night? Disperse instanter, and if it be that ye have aught to say on the morrow when ye are sober, my Lord bids me say he will hold a love-day, and listen to your complaints."

"We want no love-day," sang out one, surlily.

"Who are we?" cried another, "we are those who want no bailiff to tell us what to do. We want to see the Baron. Order him to come straightway."

The bailiff gasped. "*Order* the Baron!" The heavens could tremble, after all! "Varlets! Idle churls! How dare ye talk so insolently? By my two ears some of ye will hang for this night's work."

"Now thou hast but one ear to swear by," cried a great fellow, approaching the bailiff and slicing off one ear with a stroke of his knife.

The bailiff screamed and clapped his hand to his bleeding head. "The land is full enough of bailiffs," shouted some.

"Seize him, seize him," cried others.

The heavens had fallen. His fat cheeks were chalky and hung flabbily under his eyes. He saw his mistake. He should have been more conciliatory. "Hold, fellows, what would ye, drink?"

But his trembling voice was lost in the babble that arose as two or three took hold of him and bore him along, shrieking pitifully. As those that carried him seemed not to know what to do with their burden, a man solved the problem by reaching forth a rusty sword and severing the head from the body. In a trice half a dozen fellows were after the rolling head, and had raised it, dripping, upon a lance. The lance they stuck into the ground with the head lifted on high, that all might see. Several others busied themselves with picking up twigs and branches, and in a few minutes they had a roaring bonfire in a wide circle about the lance, so that the curling flames lit up its hideous, ghastly burden.

The men danced about the fire in glee.

"Ha, ha, Sir Bailiff," they mocked, "who are we, indeed? Do you know us now, Master Bailiff?"

While others said:—

"We are thy master, now, Sir Bailiff, and the masters of all England from this night on."

"Serfs and villeins ye be, and serfs and villeins

ye remain," called a strong, contemptuous voice from the doorway.

They paused, and saw de Leaufort standing coolly before them. His arms were folded on his breast. He had not taken the trouble to arm himself. Surely a noble of the realm need not quail before his own villeins. He also held feudalism a law of the universe.

"Begone, madmen," he commanded. "Disperse to your homes! Ye must be all out of your senses; the scourge and the whip shall bring them back to you, I promise you. Not many shall see his feet for many days to come."

Then, as he caught sight of the bailiff's head stuck on the lance, he started back in amazement at their daring. Before he could speak again, a dozen fellows pushed him roughly from the door and made their way into the house. "Stay," he cried hoarsely; but no one paid the slightest attention to him, save that one or two, in passing, plucked at his beard, and one clapped his hand familiarly on his shoulders, and called him "Brother." "For," he said, "from to-night we all shall be brothers throughout the land, and not masters and slaves."

The Baron passed one hand across his brow as if he, too, were taking leave of his senses. Was

it some terrible nightmare? He had been warned that the people were rising, he had expected some setting forth of grievances, and perhaps some slight show of force; but insolence like this was past all belief.

As he stood hesitating, there approached John Kyrkeby to him, who stuck a huge clenched fist into his face and said surlily: "Look you, Baron de Leaufort, the time for such as you has come. The land has groaned long enough under the sway of barons and earls. Mark me, there are some here who will not rest till your blood soak this ground. I think myself they have gone far enough, yet keep a civil tongue within your head, or it will roll on the earth as that other did. Have a care, or I cannot protect you."

"Thou protect me, indeed!" cried de Leaufort, drawing himself up proudly. "I am well used to hold my back up to thee to be measured for the cloth, but I shall never demean myself by holding it to thee for protection. Indeed! wilt protect me with thy shears?"

The man gave a hoarse laugh. "Ay! it tastes strangely on the tongue, does it not? Yet, mark me, the signs of my trade will be remembered and thought somewhat of long after yours will be forgotten; for, of a truth, the time is come

when men must earn their bread, as Holy Writ saith, by the sweat of their brow, or go breadless."

The Baron made an impatient gesture and turned to enter the house.

"Here," cried the tailor, "bind him! it will do no harm to keep him from mischief."

Twenty men rushed upon de Leaufort to do their leader's bidding. His eyes darted fire. "Touch me not," he cried, "caitiffs! I suffer no such indignity at your hands. Kill me, and ye will find that I can die as a brave soldier, but I cannot owe my life to dogs."

An arrow let fly grazed his cheek and drew blood.

"Bring me the man that shot that," shouted Kyrkeby; "another arrow, and it will stick from his own hulk."

While they were securing the Baron, who was obliged to submit, dozens of fellows came rushing from the house as if shot out of a catapult, tumbling over one another, carrying jewelled goblets and precious vases, casks of wine, suits of mail, and oaken chests.

Some set upon the chests and ripped them open with axes, and allowed the contents to scatter on the ground; others burst open casks of

wine, and what was not soaked into the earth speedily went to make the mob the wilder.

“To the fire, to the fire, in with them,” they shouted.

Some obeyed. Others first decked themselves out in the fineries and strutted up and down and cut queer capers, curious as children to know how it would feel to have a long tail dragging behind them as they walked. One fellow was seen to slip a jewelled goblet into his tunic. He was instantly jerked from his feet, and at a nod from their leader was thrown bodily on to the flames, the jewelled goblet aimed after him. The fellow screamed in agony, and some seemed taken aback, but the multitude approved, and cried out:—

“Thus do we serve all thieves.”

“We are honest men, not thieves; we shall cast the jewels and the gewgaws on the flames, but it must not be said that we burn down manors only to rob their contents,” cried Simon the smith.

The Baron stood on one side, his arms bound to his side, one moment cursing under his breath, and the next assuming a stolid indifference as he watched one after another of his possessions thrown on the bonfire, and disappear in a pillar of flame. Suddenly some fellows created a new diversion by making a cross-piece of two lances,

and rigging it up with a huge pile of fineries which had been dragged from one of the chests. This they dressed in a surcoat of tyretain furred with the skins of many martens, throwing over it a long mantle of velvet, lined with ermine, and surmounting the whole with a magnificent scarlet hat with a large white plume nodding from it, and a great clasp of gold in the very front. Then, standing at a distance from this effigy, the men gleefully riddled it with arrows. Tiring of this sport, some one snatched a burning brand from the fire and flung it, showering sparks in every direction, upon the roof of the Manor House. Instantly more brands were thrown on by other willing hands, and the house was soon roaring so fiercely that the men had to give way before it.

“Fellows, this is the man who has undone by force our lovely Rose Westel, the handsomest maid in Cambridgeshire.”

A strange light came into de Leaufort’s eyes. Could this be, after all, but a woman’s revenge?

A hoarse shout arose from a hundred throats.

“Throw him back into his own house.”

“It will give him a warm enough welcome.”

“Off with his head.”

“We will bear it with us to Blackheath and

set it up there that all may know who are the masters of England."

The Baron closed his eyes and calmly awaited the fatal stroke which he knew could not be long delayed.

It came; but notwithstanding its perfect aim, it did not strike de Leaufort, but sent a jet of hot blood from the white kerchief of a woman who had rushed from the darkness to fling her arms about him.

He bent over her with a hoarse cry, tugging at his bonds until one from pity severed them with a stroke of his knife.

"Rose, Rose, you here?"

She opened her eyes and smiled. Death bore a radiant visage, seeing that her lover's arms were about her, his breath was on her cheeks, her life was for his. A tall, slender figure sprang to her side, pressed a crucifix against her stiffening lips, and all was over.

Murmuring the prayer for the dead, the figure kneeled in solemn contemplation of the lovely face, and then suddenly drew itself up and turned its burning eyes upon the throng. A shiver ran through them all. It was their old leader, Robert Annys.

For an instant he looked on them in silence.

In his face, grief and pity, and anger and indignation, all struggled for mastery. As his gaze wandered to the rich stuffs, trampled and soiled on the ground, the shattered, gaping chests, the twisted pieces of silver and gilt, and finally the lance with the grawsome head surveying the smoking and blackened ruins of the Manor House, at last the indignation—passionate, intense—conquered.

“ How came ye so to shame our Cause ? ” The words burst from him at white heat.

“ What is this before me ? ” he asked ; “ a gathering of thieves and robbers and murderers, or of true men — workers who are throwing down their tools that their brethren may also have bread between their teeth ? Are we men in whose bosoms burns the desire to sweep off the face of the earth all unruth and injustice and wrong ? or are we, as some men say of us, but varlets whose envy and greed make us lust for the ease of the gentles ? Are we seeking to build up or to destroy ? Answer me that ! I tell you, fellow-men, we dare not come before the King with our hands dripping with blood and the land laid waste by our torches. And how dare we come before God with a prayer for justice on our lips, but only envy and murder in our hearts ? ”

The men stood in awed silence, looking up at Annys, who seemed to tower above them in his righteous indignation — Robert Annys, beloved of all, who had put himself again at their head as by a miracle.

The beautifully modulated voice swept on, the voice with the old familiar ring in it, the voice that once had wielded such power over them. Impassioned it continued, and yet with the overtone of a great pity and tenderness now vibrating through it.

"O my fellows, I would have died to spare you this. Right gladly would I now lay down this poor life if thereby I could know that ye shall live henceforth as free men. But to be free men, we must first deserve to be free. Is this the kind of men we seek to prove ourselves? Is this the best we wish the others to think of us? O my brothers, no enemy could have so completely undone you, as ye yourselves have done. Know you not that men may call you the scum of the earth and all vile names, but there is no power on earth that can make you so, save just yourselves? O my brothers, remember this. Cease, cease trailing our sacred Cause in the dust. Arise and follow me to the King, and come before him with head erect and look him in the eyes as

man to man. Let him see that we be no hang-dog murderers, but that the Great Uprising had its birth in Truth and Righteousness. It lies in our hands whether it go down to unborn generations as a God-given Uprising of the people against unjust tyrants, or a hellish insurrection of rapine and incendiaryism and bloodshed. If this is true,—and who can gainsay it?—who are your worst enemies, unless it be yourselves? See to it, lest, in thinking to conquer others, ye but fall before your baser selves."

Not one spoke. Had one so much as shrugged a shoulder, it must have been heard.

The speaker watched the upturned faces, and slowly it came over him that no longer did he look upon the faces of murderers. As he had spoken, the hot passions of greed and envy and hatred and revenge passed from out their hearts, and now he knew that in their place he had planted faith and hope and patience.

If he could have but faced all those souls who were marching on to Blackheath that night! Surely, some pages of English history had read differently!

But his strength, miraculously kept up to this point, now failed him. As he sank back into the arms of a sturdy fellow who had waited by his

side, seeing that he swayed from weakness, he closed his eyes wearily and sighed gently as if at peace. For he was supremely happy, since in the end he had come back to those that loved him, and had been suffered to do them service.

XXXIII

ONE year later, the sun that flashed from Ely's towers flashed from the points of a thousand spears, from as many burnished helmets and glittering coats of mail, from the polished wood of hundreds of crossbows, from the resplendent surfaces of emblazoned shields, and from shining battle-axes, swinging against the glossy haunches of war-horses. It lit up splendid sword belts of rose, azure, and vermillion, tabards superb with armorial bearings, tunics and surcoats gamboised and interlaced with silks of yellow, blue, and flame color; it illumined waving pennons and guidons, and the more stately banners with their oft-repeated device of St. George and the dragon, or the golden keys of St. Peter.

There at the head of his troops rode the proud figure of the fighting Bishop, Spencer of Norwich, his closely wrought suit of mail and helmet of finest blue steel rings, his surcoat of blue velvet, his gorget of the same, draped from the helmet. Blue flashed against blue, the clever handiwork of man and the illimitable cerulean of the sky.

Every reason had Spencer of Norwich to be proud, for the Pope had appointed him special commissioner to raise and conduct a crusade in succor of brave Ghent against the minions of Antichrist at Avignon. Even now he was on his way to join the rest of his army to set sail later from Dover. For once the Pope's war was the people's war. For once the interests of the nation and the Papacy were one, and the wealth of England need not be squandered in the support of two opposing armies. Not only was England asked to fight its hereditary enemy, France, but it was asked to succor a brave people who had thrown off the sway of a ducal ruler and had gathered about a simple Flandish burgher. No wonder that the plain people responded enthusiastically to this call. The very severity that Bishop Spencer had displayed in putting down the Uprising of the summer before now redounded to his credit—served to strengthen their confidence in him as a military leader.

Urban, thoroughly in earnest in striking a telling blow against Avignon, now outdid himself in his concessions to those who poured their wealth and treasure at his feet. Not alone was absolution granted them, but during this great emergency it became possible to obtain it for dead friends

and relatives. Here was a masterly stroke indeed; for who could hesitate to sacrifice a paltry string of jewels, or a golden goblet or two, to put out the flames that encompassed a beloved one? It would seem that, did the treasure cease pouring from castle and manor for a single day, a few well-directed sermons dwelling somewhat fondly on the tortures of hell-fire were sufficient to make the streams gush forth again!

Yet, notwithstanding the enthusiasm with which this army was raised and equipped, there rose through the land some bold voices protesting that, when the Lords and Knights and Bishops assembled at Westminster, it would have been better had they redressed the wrongs of the peasants, and restored quiet and order to the realm by wise internal regulations, instead of turning their eyes across the seas and voting moneys for a war that would neither raise up ruined manor houses nor restore wasted lands. Indeed, Wyclif and his fast-growing band of Lollards cried out in no uncertain tones that the whole quarrel between the contending Popes had to do only with worldly power and mastery, which was entirely unbefitting a Pope and wholly contrary to the example of Christ. "Neither the slaying of men nor the impoverishment of whole countries can be the out-

come of love to the Lord Jesus Christ," solemnly enjoined the great master, who, even with the hand of Death upon him, remained undaunted, suffering only his body to be conquered.

While the people of Ely had shouted themselves hoarse, and swung banners, and waved kerchiefs, two quiet figures had looked sadly, silently on, a man and a woman. They had watched the triumphant army pass, setting the dull fenland ablaze with color as it moved. When the last thread of scarlet was caught up in the blue haze where the sluggish river made its last bend, the couple turned their faces to the Cathedral. As they looked, the swamp at their feet suddenly burst into flame and then as suddenly darkened as the red sun sank. The low sparse trees, rising from the water, blackened against the horizon; the orange and the rose slowly faded from the sky, the violet-gray pallor of the night creeping over it. The rapture of day's meeting with night was over, and all the passion burned out. A few scattered groups of villagers passed them by, chatting eagerly, and then all was still. The man sighed heavily. The woman turned to him a quiet face, full of resolute courage. If there was anything to mar her perfect happiness, it was that the people had apparently been oblivious of

their dissenting presence. Not a jeer had sounded, not a stone had been thrown. Sweeter far to her than an ardent meeting of their own Lollard followers was any opportunity — however small — to suffer martyrdom for the sacred Cause. She marvelled greatly when news came to her from time to time of comrades recanting in the face of torture. She would have counted it a blessed privilege to die for the Truth, smiling into the eyes of her tormentors.

And this was Ely! Ah, the wonderful old church! even in the gathering darkness it still crowned the wide landscape. She divined the poignant memories that were stirring in her husband's breast. Twice before had he faced Ely Minster,—once proudly defiant on the threshold of life, once stricken in the bitter consciousness of defeat. This time in his heart was neither defiance nor despair. He could not defy, for he looked no longer on the Cathedral as an enemy to be crushed, but as a force to be yoked into service. If there was some condemnation in his heart, yet there was reverence as well. Reverence, for he was passionately responsive to the Mystery and Power before him. Impotent indeed he believed the new religion would be if it reckoned not with this Power, if it tossed it aside as worthless.

Rather should it forge to itself with imperishable links the mighty forces that dwelt in that stirring Presence.

Neither could he despair, for while at one time he had worked with feverish energy in the stirring sight of a fixed goal, now he had learned the difficult lesson of working on in perfect courage and perfect steadfastness for an end which he could never hope to see, which he knew could be accomplished only by God in the fulness of His time.

How much had taken place in the twelvemonth that had passed since he had faced Ely Minster! He had not died on that awful night, although he had thought it the end and had welcomed it. But he had gone through a long and serious illness. Tenderly nursed by Matilda, and safely hidden from those who were going about the land slaying all the poor priests they could lay hands on, little by little he had regained his strength until he could endure the telling of the terrible end of the Uprising. As soon as he could, he made a pilgrimage to Lutterworth, and there had a last solemn talk with John Wyclif. Once more he took up the threads of life, once more under orders from his old master. And with his bodily ills he cast off those of his moral

nature. At last wholly hers, he could ask Matilda to be his wife — no warring, clamorous instincts now, his whole being in perfect harmony resolving itself into love for her.

The Uprising was a thing of the past. It had taken more than forty years to come, a few swift days had seen its end. For one brief moment England had lain at the feet of Piers Ploughman, poor Piers never less truly conqueror than then! The gaol at Maidstone had been broken into, and John Ball placed again at the head of his people; the palace of the most powerful Duke of the realm had been sacked and reduced to ashes; the head of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of all England, had grinned from the top of London bridge in grim companionship with the murdered Treasurer of the nation. On the top of the pillory in the Bury market-place, the lifeless lips of the Chief Justice of England pressed those of the Prior of the Monastery in ghastly jest on the league between Church and Law against poor Piers. Yea, all England at the feet of its rustics — and to what end? To disperse to their homes, drunk with joy over the roseate promises of their King. The true value of a King's promise was to be learned later. Never again would a King be to them quite so kingly, since one had

turned the faith and loyalty of his people against them as the weapon of their destruction. The scores of clerks, busily writing articles of manumission while there was a rioter to be seen, were soon as busily engaged in writing new articles of bondage more galling than ever. The free pardon of all who had taken part in the Uprising, which the King so readily promised, meant the death of some seven thousands of rebels, among them beloved John Ball, quartered and hung swaying on the gates of St. Alban's as an example to all.

"By their fruits ye shall know them."

Again Robert Annys recalled that text as he stood this time before the Cathedral. But no longer it agonized him as on that night when he lay prone among the rushes. Now he saw deeper into the heart of things. He saw that the fruit of the tree is the fruit not alone of the leafy bough on which it hangs, nor alone of the strong, gnarled trunk, nor alone of the roots, deep down and hidden; but that it is borne alike of the kernel that has taken many seasons to reach the height of a man, alike of the very rainfalls that have fed the roots with the salts of the soil. Who indeed shall ever account for all the forces

that have gone to redden its cheeks and sweeten its juices?

The Uprising had failed because the people were not yet ready for success. They had failed in self-command, and therefore had grievously failed to command others. It was hard to look into the future with any show of bravery when one realized how much, how much the people must learn, how much work there was to be done by a few strong, patient souls. And yet, to Robert Annys the very failure of the Uprising had within it something precious. He believed that if no slightest seed may fall to the ground unheeded, surely the earnest efforts of thousands upon thousands of men could not be suffered to fall barren upon Eternity.

And he was right. Who shall ever say all that was done or not done by that wonderful outspeaking of the heart of the English peasantry more than half a thousand years ago—that stirring voice sinking again into silence as mysteriously as it arose? And yet who shall say that it was hushed? Is it not nearer the truth to say that it was held in the air, vibrating down through the centuries, silent unto Man, only until such time as his ears were attuned to hearken?

Indeed, easier is it to trace the tall waving

corn back to the tiny, hard grain that was tossed upon the waiting earth; easier to trace the proud mast that cleaves the air high up over the seas, back to the pine cone's quiet fall; easier to trace the broad flowing river, ship-studded, artery of great, toiling cities, to the hidden pool where the trout leap and the deer come down to drink,—than to trace through the remotest Past the mysterious ebb and flow, the wonderful crossing and recrossing, of the springs of Human Action.

In truth no historian may ever tell of the end of the Great Uprising, for it had no end, but it goeth ever on and on.

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